Applied Managerial Strategies for Reducing Resistance to Change in Kindergartens

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Abstract

Our research aims to identify which of the strategies of reducing resistance to change are used by kindergartens’ managers and to find if there is a correlation between the managerial styles and managerial strategies for decreasing resistance to change. There were investigated 51 pre-primary education teachers, who answered a complex questionnaire based survey of 81 items. Results show there is a tendency of managers from kindergarten to use the participative style of leading and to approach negotiation strategies for reducing resistance to change. No significant differences between teachers’ opinion about their leaders’ and managers’ opinion about themselves were found.

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1. Introduction change process, organizational culture and behaviour and resistance to change

Change is considered a process with a high level of abstraction which can’t be simulated nor modified in laboratory conditions (Jex, 2002); it allows people and organizations to move from a present state to a desired one. Bridges and Mitchell define organizational change as an external and visible process, which develops into new organizational politics, structures and managerial practices (Nicolescu, 2006). No matter the view, the change is complex with several subcomponents. One of the most quoted theories is Lewis’ model, which describes 3 stages of the organizational change. The unfreeze stage involves the impaired balance of moods and behavioural status; basically the organization starts to feel the need for change, leading to adjustments of present behaviours. It identifies with the mechanisms and persons that oppose to change. The second stage is change process itself – there are found answers based on new information. The refreeze is the stage where we can develop different strategies for reducing the resistance to change (Lewin, 1947). Later on Lewis develops another model of action for the process. It is described by problem identification phase- the difference between the present and the desired stage, hypothesis development phase – where are found new ways of solving the organizational problems, hypothesis testing phase and data analysis (Lewis, 1951). In 1993, Champy and Hamer introduced a new concept for the organizational
change so called “reengineering”; it is considered to be the best way to attain organizational performances on managerial level by recreating the concept, the implementation and the final part of the change process.

Change has a lot of determinants: economic, political, cultural, scientific and technological ones. On institutional level when coming to change we confront with a phenomenon which doesn’t modify so easy: the organizational culture, still there is one exception found in young organizations where it lays in shaping stage. Most of the people make negative assumption when something new must be introduced, reason why they develop resistance to change behaviours. Based on organizational culture, the organizational behaviour depends on the groups’ structure, its’ performances and behaviour (Middleton, 2002). Inside the organization, as Elton Mayo said, the human being is a social, active and interested person which aims to contribute to the development at its’ organization. The best results in work activity are attained when people feel accepted, satisfied and integrated in their workgroups (Radu et al., 1998; Bogathy, 2004; Zlate, 2004).

Change preparation strongly depends on work satisfaction level, risk and effort assumptions. When people are satisfied with their work activity, they will usually identify a high risk and a high personal effort when there is a need to implement new activities, leading to the development of mechanisms of resistance to change. By resistance to change people maintain a known behaviour, because of feelings like the idea of being threatened and anxiety (Jex, 2002), with all that a change process is mandatory and represents the only way to attain a better productivity level. Among its logical and emotional determinants there are: personal comfort, individual behaviours, fear of unknown, own interests, risks, power losing, prestige lowering, incapacity to solve new problems, disruptions in the relational system, different perception over change, a conservative personality, powerless of change, inexistence of a leader and of organizational culture (Nicolescu & Nicolescu, 2006).

Inside the educational organizations there is a strong correlation between schools’ organizational culture – seen as a collection of norms, values, customs and traditions formed over time and passed from generation to generation, students’ motivation for learning and teachers satisfaction regarding work process. There are 2 forms of organizational culture we might meet in schools: normative and expressive. Both organizational behaviour and culture are regulated by different documents: Low 1/2011, new curriculum for pre-primary education and many other ones developed by educational institutions. One of the most important documents is the internal regulation of institution, where each member of the organization finds direction regarding his behaviour.

There are also a series of determinants that influenced the changes inside the educational system in general and in the pre-primary education one in special: reform in education, Romanian legislation, new curriculum for pre-primary education, wages decreasing, decentralization of educational system and of course the demography.

2. Managerial styles and approached strategies for reducing resistance to change

Management is an activity by which a person with a leader role manages to run an organization by: establishing clear objectives for attaining aimed finalities, planning, implementing, assessing and assigning responsibilities for each member of the organization (Niculescu, 2007).

It is known that organizations don’t have clear aims, but they have specialists that create them. No matter the organizational structure, the flagship of an organization is represented by its management, which is responsible with the development, monitoring and internal assessment of change.

Each manager has his own way to deal with issues and people, and specialists call it managerial style. It is the result of internalised rules within a lifetime, combined with personality and environmental factors, all pointing in one direction. One of the most famous classifications results from the interaction of 2 important factors: Human resources focus and task solving focus and it defines 5 managerial styles: autocratic, passive, administrative and thoughtful. Dominant managers tend have a task solving to orientation, they use make independent decisions; they aren’t interested in their employees’ opinion, nor in their motivation for work. This style lowers the degree of initiative and team innovation, leading to an increased level of frustration and to the employees’ tendency to “sell” their idea to someone who listens to them. Mangers with a passive or with a laissez – faire style don’t usually make extra efforts; they use to postpone activities and want to “look good in front of the superiors”. With time it leads to: the dissipation of feelings associated with belonging to a team, laziness and conflict facilitation. With all that
passive leading style is effective for creative and intrinsic motivated subordinates. Administrative managers are the type of leaders who always respect the procedures and have total control over the decisional process. It is based on routine activities that must be implemented, while the only type of relations this managers encourage, are the official ones. People under their command often have a low motivation and feel misunderstood. Thoughtful leaders care for their colleagues too much, in the detriment of activity efficiency. They use to listen to others, taking in consideration their ideas or complaints. While people have strong feelings of belonging, it appears the risk of lowering the motivation degree or postponing work tasks. The major attribute of participative style is balance, managers are centred both on their people and on tasks, succeeding in attaining organizational aims, by offering a clear vision over of what has to be done, they use to actively involve their colleagues in work process, treating them as being equal, solving their conflicts and avoiding activities turmoil.

Managers often apply different strategies for reducing resistance to change. In order to renounce at old habits and skills and to develop new efficient ones, coordinators use to approach 2 different types of strategies: negotiation and force involving ones. When negotiating the change executives are encouraging their employees to actively get involved in the process by: debating, finding implementation alternatives and assigning roles to each person who’s being part of the action. In the same time the directors who impose the change often inform the employees about the new events, decide by their own, are not interested the people opinion and, when needed they use force and supervise ways to attain better results, they can also use penalty.

Inside the pre-primary organization, the management assumes the coordination of the whole educational process as it was assumed by him in the managerial plan of the institution he leads. He is the legal representative of the institution, responsible for the following activities: organizing and coordinating the kindergarten activity along with the administration council, creating institution’s development plan, the annual and biannual managerial plans with the help of administrative council, creating employees activity planning and job descriptions for each one of his colleagues, approving and monitoring the educational program in kindergarten, assessing and improving the quality of educational process, ensuring mentorship and facilitating the training process of the employees, ensuring the compliance of internal regulation and for giving advices regarding the awarding system inside the organization.

To investigate what kind of stress reducing strategy is applied in kindergartens and how they correlate with the dominant managerial style we have conducted the following research.

3. Research design

Our research objectives are: to identify which of the diminishing resistance to change strategies are used more often by kindergartens’ managers and to find if there is a correlation between the managerial styles and managerial strategies for decreasing resistance to change.

Research population consists in 46 pre-primary and primary teachers and 5 kindergarten managers, from Brasov area. Most of the investigated specialists are women (50 of them, and only one man) between 23 and 29 years old. According to Figure 1, we can see they were classified into 3 classes. If we take a close look at Figure 2, it can be seen that our subjects have a variable work experience; ¼ of teachers are young and have less than 5 years experience in the working field and almost 1/3 of them have over 15 years of work experience, while the others have an average professional experience. According to both figures, we conclude that teachers have enough experience in the work field. 19.6% of our subjects have only high school studies, 11, 8% went to college, 64, 7% have a bachelor degree and only 3,9% graduated a master in education. Regarding the participation at national and international projects we obtained the following data: 31% of high school graduates participated at national projects and 29, 42% in international ones; 84% from college graduates have participations in national projects and none in international ones; 60% of bachelor graduates involved in national project 21, 17% in international ones. Although it is less represented, the most active category of teachers is the masters’ graduates who have 100% participation at both national and international projects.
We assumed that we will find a strong correlation between managerial styles and strategies of reducing change resistance of leaders. To investigate the respondents we used a questionnaire based survey made of 81 items. It has 4 dimensions: A- factual data, B- personal risk and effort perception, C - managerial strategies for reducing resistance to change and D- managerial styles identification.

4. Research results

Respondents’ classified answers at items pointing to the negotiations strategies used by managers to reduce resistance to change, are the following: 0% of them chose 1st class (meaning the inexistence of the negotiation techniques), 4,31% of answers are found in the 2nd one (less usage of negotiation technique), 23,13% - 3rd class (average use of the technique), 36,4% - 4th class (frequent use of it) and 35,68% - 5th class – the highest class possible, corresponding to permanent application of negotiation technique by managers.

According to the research lot, managers use less the force strategies to impose change: 14% - class 1 (indicating the absence of force techniques), 27%- class 2 (less use of force), 34, 50- class 3 (medium use), 17, 64% class 4 (frequent use) and only 5, 88% - class 5, arguing that managers always use force to implement change. It can be concluded that managers prefer to negotiate change rather than to impose it.

The most used leading style by managers from kindergartens is the participative one, with averages of 4, 50 according to managers’ own assessment of leading style and of 4, 09 when taking into consideration their colleagues’ answers. At only one point difference we find the thoughtful leading style (averages of: 3, 60 – managers and 3, 83 subordinates) and administrative leading style (averages of: 3,20 managers and 3,60 employees). Last classified managerial styles are: autocratic (averages 2, 45 – managers and 2, 50 employees) and passive (averages of 2, 50 – managers and 2,60 employees) one.

The research results show a positive significant correlation between the autocratic leading style and the usage of force strategies for introducing change into organization (r=0,326, p<0,05), meaning that when comes to a dominant managerial style is more likely to use force techniques to impose change inside the organization. A negative correlation was found between negotiation style for introducing change and autocratic leading style (r= -0, 239, p<0, 01). We understand than managers with a rigid managing style aren’t used to approach negotiations techniques to implement change.
Positive correlations were found between 3 leading styles and negotiations strategies for reducing resistance to change as follows: participative style (r= 0.743, p<0.01), thoughtful leading style (r= 0.644, p<0.01), administrative style (r=0.383, p<0.01).

Only one other negative correlation was found between passive leading style and negotiation strategies (r=-0.546, p<0.01).

We can draw the following conclusions: mangers from kindergartens seem to understand the most efficient strategies for reducing resistance to change are negotiations one; in this manner they encourage their colleagues to actively involved in change process inside the organization. As results showed the most common managerial style is the participative one, directly and positively linked to the negotiation strategies.

References