



CHANGE, RESISTANCE TO CHANGE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CYNICISM

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Abstract:

Over the past decades, the focus of the scientists has shifted towards the area of organizational change. The concept has been approached from several perspectives and studied by numerous disciplines and refers to a shift or transformation of an organization, of several components of the organization or of the processes that lie within. Being in an environment characterized by competitiveness and complexity, organizations are under a constant need of change, of progress, while the aim of each change is to improve the aspects that make this happen. The dynamics of the labour force market has contributed to the creation of an environment in which organizations are permanently facing the need to implement various changes regarding their strategy, structure, processes or culture. Henceforth, the factors that can alter the implementation of change benefit from an increased focus. Understanding the reason for which some employees can resist change can have major financial implications for the organization. When considering the human resources involved in the change, nothing seems simple; most of the times things are not as they should be, and most of the employees experience a resistance to change, sometimes in the form of change-specific cynicism, a notion defined as the belief of employees that the organization in which they work lacks integrity. This paper represents the cultural adaptation of Change-Specific Cynicism Scale (a scale proposed by David J. Stanley in 1998, validated on the Canadian population), to the specifics of the Romanian population and supplies a method of evaluating change-specific cynicism for the specialized literature. Statistic results have shown that the Change-Specific Cynicism Scale has a high level of internal consistency ($\alpha=0,84$) and can be used exclusively for equivalent populations. Moreover, this paper aims to approach the term organizational cynicism and its role in the context of organizational change.

Key words: cynicism, organizational change, organizational culture

1. Introduction

The current organizational environment, characterized by complexity and competitiveness, forces organizations, through its specific dynamics, to evolve in order to remain profitable and competitive. Organizational change generates difficult situations and contexts for the employees, which may result in their facing dismissing, demotion or cancellation of financial incentives. This also implies changes in the organizational culture, work colleagues, superiors, situations which generate a high level of discomfort for the employee (Davis et al. 2004).

The attitude of the employees regarding organizational change are always influenced by past experiences, available information and individual cognitive processes. A central factor that needs to be considered for its large impact on the attitudes of the employees in the process of change is the perception of trust in the management; in more specific terms, the perception of the competence, benevolence, and integrity of the management plays an important role in accepting change. The employees are not passive to change, but hold an active role in creating and supplying an answer to change (Rafferty & Griffin, 2008). The role of the individual is more and more studied in the research of organizational change (Bartunek et al., 2006; George & Jones, 2001; Kiefer, 2005; Budeanu & Pitariu, 2009). A longitudinal study published by Kiefer (2005, apud. Budeanu & Pitariu, 2009) stresses the fact that the emotional response of the individuals to change are important in the understanding of the success or failure of the efforts for change. Its results show that the frequency of change undergone by a person at the work place is connected to the frequency of the negative emotions reported, which lead to a lowering of trust, lack of engagement, decrease in performance (Rafferty & Griffin, 2008).

Change can be defined as a transformation observable in time, which affects temporarily or briefly the structure and functionality of the social organization of a certain community, and which shifts the course of its history or development (Abraham, 2000). Organizational change is a process that happens in time, with periods of instability, in which the lack of safety of a system is the answer to the need of survival in an environment under constant change.

Despite the existence of a large number of models for diagnosing organizational change, Beer and Nohria (Beer & Nohria, 2000) claim that 70% of all change initiatives fail, because managers adopt an “alphabet soup of initiatives” without trying to completely understand the nature and process of organizational change. Resistance to change can be defined any opposition to the alteration of a certain situation and represents a regular reaction to change. The insecurity felt by employees is the dominant element of the resistance to change.

Coch and French (1948) have been the first to adopt the concept of resistance to change in the paper “Overcoming Resistance to Change”. Piderit (2000) claims that resistance to change has yet to capture the complexity of the individuals’ reaction to change.

Most of the time, resistance is connected to negative attitudes or counterproductive behaviours. Wanous, Reichers and Austin (2000) have examined these attitudes and have concluded that among them are omission, deception and deviation at the workplace, and also negation and cynicism (Wanous et al. 2000). There are, however, strong arguments that claim that resistance must not be seen as a completely negative element, because it can have a major role in the organizational attempts to change (Waddell & Sohal, 1998).

2.Organizational cynicism

Cynicism has been associated with a series of negative elements such as apathy, resignation, alienation, lack of hope, lack of trust in others, suspicion, disillusion or low performances, interpersonal conflicts, absenteeism, exhaustion (Andersson, 1996). It can also be understood as a form of self-defence from the part of the employees, a way of facing enigmatic or disappointing events (Reichers et al., 1997).

Organizational cynicism is specific to organizational change and implies a real loss in the trust in the leaders of change and can be the answer to attempts of change which are not transparently or fully successful. Cynicism in the context of organizational change represents a reaction to the failed attempts of change, which consists of pessimism towards future efforts and the conviction that the agents of change are lazy and incompetent. Management is perceived as having broken the obligation to continuously search for means of improving the performance. Change-specific cynicism is an indication of the intention to resist organizational change (Thompson et al. 2000).

Reichers (et al. 1997) mention the fact that the effort of organizational change is the most common target of cynicism. More specific, he describes cynicism as an attitude driven by the uselessness of change, as cynicism is a potential barrier factor in the organizational change. He also suggests methods to avoid organizational cynicism, among which is employee involvement in taking decisions that affect themselves, consolidating the credibility of management and avoiding changes that occur suddenly. He has defined cynicism related to organizational change as a combination of pessimism connected to the likelihood of organizational change towards the persons responsible for change, who are perceived as lazy or incompetent, an approach that captures the change itself, as well as the leaders of change.

For Stanley (et al. 2005) *change-specific cynicism* will be an indicator of resistance to change. The employees that believe that the management is involved in a change with implicit or different motives than announced will not want to conform to the management's request to change their behaviour. Moreover, Stanley's (et al., 2005) research offers suggestions for the management of attitudes towards change. The employees tend to be more cynical toward organizational change when they have been more cynical towards management in general. Surprisingly, dispositional cynicism did not have a significant connection to the cynicism towards specific

changes. Therefore, change related cynicism seems more like a reaction to the experiences from within the organization rather than a general one. The employees' specific attitudes regarding change are being formed by organizational experience. The fact that cynicism and scepticism have been negatively linked to the perceptions of the employees regarding the implication of communication in the process of change is an indication that a key component in the efficiency of the initiation process of any organizational change is communication. Stanley (et al., 2005) refers to cynicism as "doubting somebody's implicit and explicit motives", and to organizational cynicism as "doubting the integrity of management", and describes change-specific cynicism as the cynicism felt by the employees that go through a period of uncertainty following a change at organizational level, and defines it as doubting the implicit or explicit motives of the management with regards to a specific change.

The employees that *do not understand the motive for the change* will be distrustful regarding the motivation why the change is being implemented, and could, therefore, question the reasons behind the change. Moreover, the attempts to make the employees understand why change is necessary are equivalent in many cases to explaining the manner in which the change will work. Understanding the motives of change is expected to diminish the change-specific cynicism.

The employees that question the motives of management for implementing change are likely to exhibit *resistance to change* more than the employees that do not question them. Similarly, the employees that doubt the fact that change will reach its objectives are more likely to resist the attempts of implementing change more than the employees that see the objectives as attainable. Cynicism has a connection to the intention to resist change.

3. Research methodology

We have aimed to develop through the present study a valid instrument that will be available to managers in the future for evaluating the behaviours developed during the process of organizational change.

The cultural adaptation starts from a scale introduced by David J. Stanley in 1998, *Change-Specific Cynicism Scale* – 11 items, *Understanding the Reason of Change* – 6 items and *The Intent to Resist* – 6 items. From a methodological point of view, the entire study has been done in complete accordance to the procedural criteria imposed by the International Test Commission (ITC) regarding the rules for translating and adapting instruments. For example, we can list several representative items: "I question the reasons of the management for this change"; "The reasons of the management for implementing the change are a mystery for me"; "I will not invest any effort to make this change work" – and their assessment is done on a Likert 5 step scale.

The collected data have been processed using the software SPSS 23, with the aim of identifying the measures of central tendency, mean and standard deviation and the internal consistency coefficient of the items Cronbach's Alpha, as well as

comparing the means of the answers received for the two versions – the English and the Romanian version.

Participants

Eighty-six, 86, individuals took part in the study that work in a state institution and who have taken part in the past years to the changes that took place in the administrative system (employee layoffs, taking over the responsibilities from the former employees, drastic salary cuts, job reorganizations, lack of job security, etc.).

The participants were aged between 29 and 59 years old, full-time employees, working 40 hours a week, from a state institution. The age average of the participants is 36,25 years, with a standard deviation of 7,407. Regarding the gender, 67,9% were women and 32,1% were men.

Results of the research

We have performed an internal consistency analysis for the items on the *Change-Specific Cynicism Scale*, with the Cronbach's Alpha value of .0,846 for the 11 items of the inventory, which indicates certainty for repeated measurements. The Change-Specific Cynicism Scale records for the 86 participants a mean of 33,07 with a standard deviation of 6,45. According to the results, the adapted instrument has a good internal consistency for both the Romanian version and the English one, with Cronbach's Alpha of .0,849.

Table 1. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items
.849	.851	11

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	Number of Items
33.0741	41.225	6.42068	11

The data collected from the 86 participants, from whom 47 were from the English version, has been subsequently subject to a statistic analysis to see to which degree the answers received are similar or different in the two stages of the adjustment procedure. We used the Wilcoxon test, and the results do not show any significant difference between the original English version and the Romanian version (Wilcoxon $z=1,76$, two-tailed $p=0,078$), therefore the two versions are equivalent and refer to the same psychological reality.

The same methodology was used for calculating the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient for the items of the 3 scales.

Table 3. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items
.845	.844	23

Table 3 above shows that the items of the three scales are correlated among them, with an internal consistency index of .0,845, which indicates a good internal correlation and reliability for repeated measurements.

4. Conclusions

For decades employee attitude has been an area of interest for researchers. The major reason for interest is the profound impact of employee's attitude on their behavior and many organizational outcomes. Attitudes like job satisfaction, work engagement and organizational commitment have received the most significant attention. There is a growing concern among organizational managers and researchers for employee's attitudes having potentially devastating effects on organizations. Among these attitudes a relatively new addition is organizational cynicism, defined as a negative attitude towards organization (Dean, Brandes, & Dhwardkar, 1998) or an attitude of exhaustion with negativity as key characteristic. For the present study this definition has been adopted. Organizational Cynicism occurs when employee feels that organization can not be trusted/relied upon (Abraham, 2000). This negativity in attitude brings negative results for the organization in terms of employee's performance commitment, satisfaction and change.

Organizational change is an essential and frequently approached concept for organizational processes. The present study approaches organizational cynicism and change-specific cynicism as current concepts while few references are available for our country. Very few attempts have been made regarding the development, design or adaptation of instruments that measure cynicism as a reaction resisting organizational change on the Romanian population, as these concepts are still a novelty.

Following the processing of the data obtained from the cultural adaptation, the results show that the items of the Romanian version are a close representation of the ones in the English version of the Change-Specific Cynicism Scale regarding the examined concepts, and there is a significant consistency between the usage of the original English version and the Romanian version (Wilcoxon: $N=86$, $z=1,76$, two-tailed $p=0,078$). Moreover, the consistency coefficients Cronbach's Alpha for the two versions are similar to the ones obtained in the original research. There are, however, limitations regarding the organizational environment in which the data collection took place and the relatively small number of participants to the study.

As we have mentioned throughout the study, research has shown that organizational cynicism has a great influence on the changes that take place at organizational level, hindering the process of change and, thus, generating a loss of money and time. All organizational contexts require a certain level of trust from the employee towards the management and, therefore, towards the organization. This will ensure a low level of organizational cynicism, which will help change take place with greater ease and speed. Change cannot be implemented without the involvement and support of the direct employees, since they are most of the time the ones that experience or deal with the changes (Cartwright, 2006). All efficient changes must rely on the assumption that all the involved persons will fulfil the commitments undertaken and will not have hidden interests.

The moment when cynicism is identified and this resistance is diminished or even eliminated, the commitment and involvement of the employees towards the organization will grow. When the relationships are based on common trust, the persons are willing to devote themselves to the organization, thus boosting the involvement, performance and satisfaction at the work place.

5. References

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