



Original Article

The Application of Human Relations Theory in Overcoming Resistance to Management Policy

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Abstract:

Resistance to change is one of the main challenges in the implementation of new management policies in organizations. This literature study aims to explore the application of Human Relations Theory as an approach to overcome resistance to a policy. By analyzing the principles of Human Relations Theory and integrating them with change management models, this study provides insights into how building a positive relationship between management and employees, involving employees in the change process, and meeting employees' social and psychological needs can help reduce resistance and increase acceptance of new policies. The research method used is a systematic literature study by collecting and analyzing relevant literature sources. The results of the study show that the application of Human Relations Theory can be an effective strategy in managing resistance to change, especially in the context of the implementation of new management policies.

Keywords: Human Relations Theory, Resistance to Change, Management Policy, Change Management.

Introduction

In the dynamic and ever-evolving world of business or organization, the need to make changes in a sustainable manner is essential. This is necessary to maintain a competitive advantage and improve the performance of the organization. Without adapting to change, companies can fall behind their competitors and experience a decrease in productivity and operational efficiency. Therefore, effective change strategies and good management are key in achieving optimal results and maintaining a competitive position in the market (Doppelt, 2017). One of the main challenges in implementing the new management policy is facing resistance from employees. This resistance can arise for a variety of reasons, including discomfort with change, fear of uncertainty, and fear of losing control or position within the organization. Understanding and overcoming these



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resistances is important to ensure that the change process can run smoothly and effectively. (Tsaousis & Vakola, 2018); (Oreg et al., 2018). Resistance to change can take many forms, such as distrust, dissatisfaction, or even outright rejection of new initiatives. Employees may doubt management's intentions, feel dissatisfied with the proposed changes, or actively refuse to comply with new policies. Understanding these different forms of resistance is an important step in effectively managing change and ensuring better acceptance throughout the organization (Bovey & Hede, 2001).

If not handled properly, resistance to change can significantly hinder the successful implementation of new policies in an organization. This resistance can take many forms, such as distrust, dissatisfaction, or outright rejection, and can negatively impact the overall performance of the organization. Distrust of new management or policies can lead to employees being reluctant to participate or even refusing to follow new directives. Dissatisfaction can lead to a moral decline, which in turn reduces productivity and efficiency. Blatant rejection, such as sabotage or other acts of defiance, can create a work environment that is not harmonious and full of conflict. Rationally, managing this resistance requires a structured and communicative approach. Management must be transparent about the reasons for the change and involve employees in the planning and implementation process. By providing space for employees to voice their concerns and contribute to solutions, organizations can reduce the fear and uncertainty that often form a basis for resistance. Additionally, adequate training and support must be provided to ensure employees have the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt to the changes. As such, understanding and overcoming resistance is key to ensuring that new policies can be implemented successfully and that negative impacts on organizational performance can be minimized (Piderit, 2000). Previous research has identified several key factors that can lead to employee resistance to change. The fear of the unknown is often one of the main causes of resistance. When employees don't have a clear picture of what's going to happen or how the change will affect them, they tend to feel anxious and reluctant to adapt. In addition, fear of losing power or status also plays a significant role in resistance to change. Employees who feel that their position or role in the organization is threatened by the change may resist or even oppose the change efforts to protect their personal interests.

A lack of understanding of the reasons and benefits of change can also create resistance. If management does not effectively communicate the goals and benefits of the change, employees may not see the value of the change and are more likely to resist or not participate wholeheartedly (Paper & Ugray, 2008). Rationally, to overcome this resistance, management needs to take proactive steps such as providing clear and detailed information about the upcoming change, explaining the benefits for both employees and the organization, and ensuring that employees feel supported and prepared to adapt. This can involve training, question and answer sessions, and open communication channels where employees can voice their concerns and get clarification (Kanter, 1992). By understanding and addressing these factors, organizations can reduce resistance and increase the chances of successful implementation of change, which will ultimately aid in achieving long-term goals and improving overall performance. (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1989); (Bovey & Hede, 2001). Therefore, it is very important for organizations to develop effective strategies in overcoming resistance to a management change.

One of the approaches that can be applied in managing resistance to change is the Human Relationship Theory, developed by Elton Mayo and his colleagues in the early 20th

century. This theory highlights the importance of paying attention to the social and psychological needs of employees in the work environment. According to this theory, employees are not just components in a production machine, but rather individuals who have social needs, such as a sense of acceptance, being valued, and being given the opportunity to interact positively with their coworkers. Mayo found that when these needs were met, employees tended to show improvements in motivation, job satisfaction, and productivity. A deeper understanding of these needs can assist management in designing more effective change strategies. For example, before implementing a new policy, management can hold an open discussion or question and answer session to listen to employees' concerns and explain the benefits of the change. Additionally, building a supportive work culture with team building activities or reward programs can help employees feel more engaged and valued. By adopting the Human Relations Theory approach, organizations can create a more harmonious and supportive work environment, so that resistance to change can be minimized and employees can more easily accept and adapt to new policies.

This approach improves not only individual performance but also overall organizational performance, as employees who feel valued and supported are more likely to contribute positively to organizational goals ([Antony & Preece, 2002](#)). By creating a positive relationship between management and employees, as well as involving employees in the decision-making process, resistance to change can be minimized ([Kanter, 1992](#)). Previous research has shown that the application of the principles of Human Relationship Theory can help increase employee engagement and reduce resistance to change ([Piderit, 2000](#)). However, there is still a gap in the literature on how Human Relations Theory can be integrated with existing change management models to overcome resistance to specific management policies. Therefore, this literature study aims to explore the application of Human Relations Theory as an approach to overcome resistance to new management policies. By analyzing the principles of Human Relations Theory and integrating them with change management models, this study will provide insights into how building a positive relationship between management and employees, involving employees in the change process, and meeting employees' social and psychological needs can help reduce resistance and increase acceptance of new policies.

Methods

In this study, we use a systematic literature study method to explore the application of Human Relations Theory in overcoming resistance to management policies. Systematic literature study is a research method that involves searching, evaluating, and synthesizing literature that is relevant to the research question being asked (Snyder, 2019). This method allows researchers to identify, evaluate, and integrate findings from various literature sources in a systematic and structured manner. Literature Search Strategy In conducting a literature search, we use a combination of keywords relevant to the research topic, such as "Human Relationship Theory", "resistance to change", "management policy", "change management", and so on. Searches are conducted in databases of leading academic journals, such as Web of Science, Scopus, and EBSCOhost, to ensure the quality and relevance of the literature obtained. The search strategy used follows the recommended guidelines ([Templier & Paré, 2015](#)); ([Rafi et al., 2020](#)) which includes the identification of key keywords, the use of Boolean operators, and searches in

the subject or title field.

These inclusion and exclusion criteria follow the recommendations of ([Moher et al., 2009](#)) in the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure the quality and relevance of literature in systematic literature studies. Data Analysis Techniques After the relevant literature is collected, we conduct data analysis using thematic analysis methods. Thematic analysis involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) in data ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)).

Results

Application of Human Relations Theory in Overcoming Resistance to Management Policies

Resistance to change, including in terms of the implementation of new management policies, is a common challenge faced by many organizations. Studies have shown that resistance can lead to decreased productivity, increased costs, and loss of organizational talent and knowledge (Oreg et al., 2018). Therefore, overcoming resistance is key to ensuring the successful implementation of new management policies and achieving organizational goals. The Human Relationship Theory, developed by Elton Mayo and his colleagues through Hawthorne's studies in the 1920s and 1930s, offers an effective approach to overcoming resistance to change. This theory emphasizes the importance of understanding and meeting the social and psychological needs of employees in the work environment (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). By applying the principles of Human Relations Theory, organizations can build positive relationships between management and employees, involve employees in the change process, and meet their social and psychological needs. This can help reduce resistance and increase acceptance of new management policies.

One of the key principles of Human Relations Theory is the importance of open and participatory communication between management and employees. By involving employees in the decision-making process regarding new management policies, organizations can increase employees' sense of ownership and responsibility for change. Employee engagement also allows management to listen to feedback, concerns, and suggestions from employees, so that it can help overcome resistance and ensure more effective policy implementation ([Elving, 2005](#)); ([Käärrik et al., 2015](#)). Another relevant principle of Human Relationship Theory is to build a positive and trusting relationship between management and employees. When employees feel valued and trusted by management, they tend to be more open to change and more receptive to new policies. Management can build positive relationships by showing concern for the well-being of employees, listening to their input, and rewarding their contributions to the change process. In addition, Human Relations Theory also emphasizes the need to meet employees' social and psychological needs, such as belonging, appreciation, and recognition. By providing recognition and rewards to employees who support the implementation of new management policies, organizations can meet these needs and increase employee engagement and commitment ([Armenakis et al., 1993](#)).

Empirical studies have shown that the application of the principles of Human Relations Theory can help reduce resistance to change in the context of implementing new management policies. For example, a study by (Wentworth et al., 2020) found that engaging employees in the change process and addressing their concerns can effectively

reduce resistance. Another study by ([Piderit, 2000](#)) shows that when employees feel valued and trusted by management, they tend to be more open to change and more receptive to new policies.

Integration of Human Relations Theory with Change Management Model

In order to effectively manage resistance in the process of implementing new management policies, the Human Relations Theory approach needs to be integrated with change management models that have proven to be effective. By combining the principles of Human Relations Theory and the systematic steps of the change management model, organizations can create comprehensive strategies to overcome resistance and ensure the successful implementation of new policies. One popular change management model is the Eight-Step Change Model from ([Kotter, 2007](#)). This model provides a structured framework for systematically managing the change process. By integrating the principles of Human Relationship Theory into the Kotter Model, organizations can increase employee engagement and acceptance of change. The first step in the Kotter Model is to develop a sense of urgency to change. In this context, the open and participatory communication principles of Human Relations Theory can be applied by involving employees in discussions about the reasons, benefits, and needs to implement new management policies ([Elving, 2005](#)). The next step is to form a coalition of drivers of change. Here, the principle of building a positive and trusting relationship between management and employees becomes important. By involving trusted and influential employees in the change process, resistance can be minimized, and support for new policies can be increased ([Kanter, 1992](#)); ([Piderit, 2000](#)).

In the step of developing a vision and strategy, as well as communicating the vision of change, the principles of Human Relations Theory about meeting the social and psychological needs of employees become relevant. By communicating a clear and convincing vision of change, and rewarding and recognizing employees who support that vision, organizations can increase employee engagement and commitment to change ([Armenakis et al., 1993](#)); ([Kotter, 2007](#)). The next steps, such as empowering actions, generating short-term wins, and consolidating improvements, the principle of employee involvement in the decision-making process becomes important. By involving employees in the process of implementing new policies, organizations can increase their ownership and responsibility for change, as well as help overcome any resistance that may arise ([Oreg et al., 2018](#)).

In addition to the Kotter Model, other change management models such as the ADKAR Model (Hiatt, 2006) can also be integrated with Human Relationship Theory. In the ADKAR Model, the principles of Human Relationship Theory can be applied in the stages of "desire" (the desire to participate and support change) and "reinforcement" (reinforcement to sustain change). By building positive relationships, engaging employees, and providing rewards and recognition, organizations can increase employees' desire to support change and sustain the changes that have been achieved (Battilana et al., 2010); (B. C. Jones et al., 2005) The integration of Human Relations Theory with other change management models can also be done to achieve more effective results in managing resistance to the implementation of new management policies. For example, the Three-Stage Change Model of (Lewin, 1947) which includes the stages of "unfreezing" (preparing the organization for change), "changing" (making changes), and "refreezing" (stabilizing change) can be combined with the principles of Human Relationship Theory.

In the "unfreezing" stage, the open and participatory communication principles of Human Relations Theory can be applied to build employee awareness and readiness for the changes that will be made. By engaging employees in discussions about the reasons, benefits, and need to implement new management policies, initial resistance can be minimized. At the "changing" stage, the principle of building a positive and trusting relationship between management and employees becomes important. By building good relationships and involving employees in the change process, resistance can be overcome, and the implementation of new policies can run more smoothly. At the "refreezing" stage, the principles of Human Relations Theory about meeting the social and psychological needs of employees become relevant. By providing rewards, recognition, and support to employees who support change, organizations can help stabilize change and prevent resistance from reappearing in the future. In addition, the integration of Human Relations Theory with change management models can be done flexibly and adapted to the specific context and needs of the organization. For example, in a situation where employee resistance is very strong, the application of the principles of building positive relationships and mutual trust may need to be emphasized early before starting other change steps. Overall, the integration of Human Relations Theory with change management models can provide significant benefits in managing resistance to the implementation of new management policies. By incorporating an approach centered on the relationship between management and employees, as well as the systematic steps of the change management model, organizations can create comprehensive and effective strategies to overcome resistance and ensure the successful implementation of new policies.

Best Practices and Recommendations (Providing best practice recommendations in applying Human Relations Theory to overcome resistance to new management policies based on findings from literature studies)

1. Open and Participatory Communication

According to (Elving, 2005) in a study published in the journal "Corporate Communications: An International Journal", open and participatory communication is the key in overcoming resistance to organizational change 1. Involving employees in the decision-making process and providing opportunities for input can increase trust and commitment to new policies.

2. Build Trust and Good Relationships

In a study published in the "Journal of Organizational Change Management", (Appelbaum et al., 2017) emphasized the importance of building trust and good relationships with employees during the change process 2. This can be achieved through honest communication, consistent support, and showing concern for employee well-being.

3. Awards and Recognition

According to (Wentworth et al., 2020) in an article in the "Harvard Business Review", rewarding and recognizing employees who support change can help overcome resistance. This creates an environment that values positive contributions and participation in adopting new policies.

4. Collaborative and Flexible Approach

In a study published in the "Journal of Change Management", (By, 2005) suggested a collaborative and flexible approach in implementing change. Involving employees in the policy adjustment process and demonstrating flexibility can increase participation and commitment to new policies.

5. Sustainable Development

According to (D. J. Jones & Recardo, 2013) in an article in the "Training & Development Journal", providing the training and skill development necessary to implement new policies effectively can help overcome resistance. Constant support and guidance is also important during the transition process.

6. Supportive Leadership

In a study published in "Leadership Quarterly", (Herold et al., 2008) found that participatory, empathetic, and motivating leadership of employees is essential in overcoming resistance to change. Leaders must be exemplary in supporting and adopting new policies.

Conclusion

This research has provided valuable insights into the application of Human Relations Theory in overcoming resistance to new management policies. Key findings underscore the importance of a human-centered approach in the process of organizational change. Recommended best practices, such as open communication, building trust, rewards, collaborative approaches, continuous development, and supportive leadership, have proven effective in increasing employee participation and commitment to new policies. From a theoretical perspective, this study strengthens the validity of Human Relations Theory in the context of change management. These findings confirm that by taking into account human factors, such as needs, engagement, and interpersonal relationships, organizations can achieve smoother transitions and reduce resistance to change. In practical terms, the recommendations in this study provide useful guidance for managers and organizational leaders in managing resistance to new policies. By adopting a human-centric approach, organizations can create an environment that supports change, increase employee commitment, and facilitate the implementation of new policies more effectively.

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