Chapter 5
Managerial Practices as Antecedents of Employees’ Resistance to Change: Organizational Change and Human Resource Management

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ABSTRACT

This chapter deepens the study of the three components of resistance to change in employees: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. It includes an analysis of the sequential character of them, through the effect that the variables related to the management of the change process and to the change consequences for employees exert on each of these components. With a sample of employees who work in companies that have embarked on programs of change in the two years prior information gathering. Our results question the mediating effect of cognitive and affective resistance and, consequently, the sequential character of the three components of resistance. Results put forward that cognitive and affective resistance are conceptually different, have different antecedents, and exert different effects on the behavioral resistance. Moreover behavioral resistance is jointly determine by the cognitive and affective components of resistance to change.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Employees’ resistance to change is a critical psychological state that affects the success of change initiatives in organizations (Choi and Ruona, 2011). It can seriously undermine these initiatives, and even cause them to fail (Avey, Wernsing and Luthans, 2008; Oreg, 2006). Thus, it is essential that private and public organizations, which now face the need to adapt to challenging environments in order to survive, understand the resistance phenomenon (Fugate, Prussia and Kinicki, 2012).

Most research works on resistance to change have studied resistance as a one-dimensional construct and only a smaller group of works have approached this construct from a multidimensional view. From a one-dimensional perspective, resistance has been analyzed from cognitive (e.g., employees thinking it is unnecessary, not beneficial), affective (e.g., employees feeling angry, anxious), and behavioral approaches (e.g., employees complaining, trying to convince others that the change is bad), considering that any of these approaches permits, in isolation, a comprehensive analysis of resistance to change (Szabla, 2007). From a multidimensional perspective, however, those three approaches have been analyzed as three different components of the construct (e.g., Oreg, 2006; García-Cabrera and García-Barba, 2014; Piderit, 2000), although a consensus has not been reached so far regarding the relationship among them: Are they independent components or do they overlap? Do they follow a sequential chain reflecting a cognitive-affective-behavioral alignment? Answering these questions is relevant for managers to avoid the potential emerging resistance that harms the organizational change processes.

Literature on change suggests that resistance is determined, among other antecedents, by factors related to the change context; this is, variables regarding the change process which generate employee’s involvement –i.e., communication and participation– and employees expectations about the consequences of the change –i.e. perceived benefits. So we consider that an analysis on the three components of resistance to change makes it necessary to carry out a study of the effect that these antecedents have on each component of resistance. This analysis will allow us to find whether or not the three components of resistance are determined by the same antecedents, and therefore if any of them comprises any of the others. Specifically, based on the above, our research objective is to examine the possible mediating role that affective resistance could have on the effect that cognitive resistance exerts on behavioral resistance; in other words, if a sequential character of the three components of resistance whether exist or not.

2. THE THREE COMPONENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Following Hornung and Rousseau (2007), we understand change as structure-based transformations in the organization. This is the reengineering of production and administrative processes, the restructuring of the employee participation systems or the restructuring of production processes involving international outsourcing and foreign market expansion where the employees must learn new ways of thinking, acting and/or operating in order to achieve the defined objectives of the change program (Avey et al., 2008; Schalk, Campbell & Freese, 1998). The main idea underlying this approach is that member’s behavior is at the core of organizational change because organizations only change through their employees (Choi and Ruona, 2011) who determine the ultimate success of such changes (Fugate et al., 2012). In this context, resistance to change must be understood as a reaction against that change. Resistant-to-change employees adopt dysfunctional attitudes (Avey et al., 2008) in order to obstruct or completely stop the changes (Oreg, 2006).
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