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THE IMPACT OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE ON ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT EFFICIENCY

IMPACTUL REZISTENȚEI LA SCHIMBARE ASUPRA EFICIENȚEI MANAGEMENTULUI ORGANIZAȚIONAL

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Abstract: *Acest articol examinează modul în care rezistența la schimbare influențează eficiența managerială în cadrul organizațiilor și de ce înțelegerea acestei relații este esențială în mediul de afaceri actual, care evoluează rapid. Scopul cercetării este de a identifica modul în care se manifestă rezistența, cine este responsabil de gestionarea acesteia și ce practici manageriale contribuie la menținerea eficienței în timpul schimbării. A fost utilizată o metodă de cercetare calitativă, combinând o revizuire structurată a literaturii de specialitate cu analiza unor exemple reale de cazuri organizaționale pentru a evalua indicatorii emoționali, cognitivi și comportamentali ai rezistenței și consecințele lor practice. Rezultatele arată că rezistența reduce semnificativ eficiența managementului prin generarea de conflicte, încetinirea procesului decizional, creșterea costurilor operaționale și scăderea productivității. Cu toate acestea, analiza relevă și faptul că rezistența poate oferi un feedback important, ajutând managerii să identifice lacunele de comunicare, punctele slabe ale implementării și supraîncărcarea organizațională. Studiul propune strategii manageriale cheie, cum ar fi îmbunătățirea comunicării, alinierea leadershipului și utilizarea campionilor schimbării pentru a reduce rezistența și a sprijini tranziții mai ușoare. Această cercetare este importantă deoarece 60-70% din inițiativele de schimbare eșuează în principal din cauza rezistenței umane, nu a factorilor tehnologici. Prin înțelegerea modelelor de rezistență și aplicarea practicilor de management țintite, organizațiile pot îmbunătăți rezultatele schimbării, pot consolida eficacitatea leadershipului și pot promova succesul organizațional pe termen lung.*
Cuvinte cheie: *Rezistență, schimbare, eficiență, management, cultură organizațională*
JEL CLASSIFICATION: M10, M12, M14

INTRODUCTION

Organizational change is inevitable in today's fast-paced business environment, whether it is introducing new technology, changing work processes, or responding to market shifts. Unfortunately, studies show that 60–70 % of all change projects fail, and the main reason is not money or technology, but people resisting the change (Errida & Lotfi, 2021; Lines et al., 2015). Resistance to change happens when employees feel uneasy or stressed (emotionally), believe the change might threaten their job security or status (cognitively), or simply refuse to cooperate with the new way of working (behaviorally) (Oreg, 2003; Szabla, 2007). When this resistance is strong, managers end up spending a lot of their time dealing with complaints and conflicts, projects take much longer than planned, costs increase, productivity falls, and the overall efficiency of the company suffers (Nguyen et al., 2025; Deng et al., 2023).

This article analyses how resistance to change affects the day-to-day efficiency of management inside companies. The main research question is: How does resistance to change influence management efficiency inside the company? The specific objectives are to identify indicators of resistance, clarify responsibility for resistance management plans, describe the characteristics of resistant organizations, analyze real cases, propose management improvements, assess team-level effects, examine efficiency gains from low resistance, and define management's

role. By understanding these points, managers and future leaders can learn how to make change smoother and keep the company running efficiently.

MAIN CONTENT

Brief analysis of bibliographic sources

A systematic examination of peer-reviewed literature published between 2003 and 2024 reveals consistent findings across psychology, organizational behavior, and management journals. Oreg's (2003) seminal work established resistance as a dispositional trait with affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. Subsequent studies have moved beyond simply looking at individual personalities and started to explore how the whole work environment influences resistance. A key focus has been on organizational justice theory, in other words, whether employees feel they are being treated fairly in terms of rewards, procedures, and day-to-day interactions with their bosses.

Research shows that when people believe the change process is fair, when leaders communicate openly, and when they feel supported by the organization, their resistance drops significantly (Hussain et al., 2021). This means that fairness and good leadership can act as a solution to resistance, making employees more willing to accept and support new ways of working. Social exchange mechanisms (Ahmad & Cheng, 2018), and cultural moderators (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Description of the research methods used

This study employs a secondary research design based on a systematic literature review and integrative synthesis of empirical findings. The review focuses on peer-reviewed academic publications from 2003 to 2024, capturing two decades of theoretical developments and practical evidence on resistance to change. To ensure comprehensive coverage, scholarly sources were collected from major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed Central, and Sage Journals.

The search strategy applied targeted keyword combinations such as "resistance to change", "employee resistance", "organizational performance", "management efficiency", and "change failure". Articles were screened for relevance to psychological, organizational behavior, and managerial aspects of resistance. Seminal contributions such as Oreg's (2003) multidimensional model of resistance were included, along with more recent studies examining organizational justice, leadership communication, social exchange mechanisms, and cultural moderators.

The selected literature was analyzed and synthesized using an integrative approach, allowing the study to combine theoretical insights with empirical patterns across different organizational contexts. This method provided a structured basis for identifying indicators of resistance, understanding its impact on management efficiency, and outlining practical strategies for managers facing change-related challenges.

While the study relies on secondary data, efforts were made to ensure validity and reliability through the selection of peer-reviewed sources, cross-disciplinary coverage, and consistency of findings across multiple contexts. The integrative synthesis approach enables the identification of recurring patterns rather than isolated results, increasing the robustness of conclusions. However, the research is limited by the absence of primary empirical data, which restricts the ability to test causal relationships quantitatively. Future research could extend this work by applying survey-based or experimental methods to validate the proposed relationships between resistance and efficiency indicators.

Indicators of Resistance to Change in Companies

Resistance to change significantly reduces management efficiency through three well-established dimensions: affective (emotional discomfort and stress), cognitive (perceived threats to status, competence, or fairness), and behavioral (active opposition or passive withdrawal) (Oreg, 2003; Szabla, 2007). At the individual level, these reactions often originate from dispositional traits such as low tolerance for ambiguity and cognitive rigidity, with systematic reviews indicating that personal characteristics like personality traits and emotional coping styles emerge as primary

antecedents in approximately 40% of the analyzed empirical studies on resistance factors (Deng et al., 2023).

At the organizational level, resistance usually shows up as departments working in isolation, more people missing work, more employees thinking about quitting, less effort being put into tasks, and in extreme cases, intentional actions that harm the organization. These behaviors match the well-known Exit Voice Loyalty Neglect (EVLN) framework (Pugh et al., 2022). These manifestations contribute directly to the widely reported 60–70% failure rate of organizational change initiatives (Errida & Lotfi, 2021; Lines et al., 2015). Effective solutions require management practices emphasizing transparent communication, employee participation in decision-making, and procedural justice, interventions identified as critical success factors in 77% of the change management models analyzed across the reviewed literature (Errida & Lotfi, 2021).

To visualize these indicators, consider the following table 1, summarizing common signs and their potential impacts on efficiency.

Table 1. Organization indicators and their impact on management efficiency

Indicator	Description (from Studies)	Impact on Management Efficiency
Affective (Emotional)	Fear, stress from uncertainty (e.g., job loss).	Reduces motivation, increases absenteeism (up to 20% rise).
Cognitive (Perceptual)	Perceived threats to status or fairness.	Slows decision-making, heightens conflict costs.
Behavioral (Active)	Exit/neglect like turnover or reduced effort.	60-70% failure rate in changes, knowledge loss.
Organizational	Low trust, poor communication.	Delays processes, wastes 25% resources on rework.

Source: Elaborated by the author according to Oreg (2003); Ahmad & Cheng (2018)

This table highlights how unchecked indicators can erode efficiency, emphasizing the need for proactive monitoring. Beyond their individual effects, these indicators often interact and reinforce one another, creating compounding inefficiencies within the organization. For example, cognitive resistance related to perceived unfairness can intensify affective responses such as stress or frustration, which in turn lead to behavioral outcomes like withdrawal or reduced effort. This interaction effect amplifies the overall impact on management efficiency, as multiple forms of resistance emerge simultaneously. Therefore, resistance should not be treated as isolated symptoms but as an interconnected system of reactions that collectively influence organizational performance.

While Table 1 presents resistance as a set of observable indicators, in practice, resistance is not static but evolves over time through identifiable psychological stages. Change-related reactions typically follow a predictable trajectory, where initial emotional responses gradually transform into acceptance as individuals process uncertainty and adapt to new conditions. This dynamic perspective is important because management efficiency is not only affected by the presence of resistance, but also by the phase in which employees are situated during the change process. Understanding this progression allows managers to anticipate behavioral patterns, adjust communication strategies, and intervene more effectively at each stage.

Understanding this temporal evolution is essential for evaluating its impact on management efficiency. In early stages, resistance tends to be emotionally driven, generating confusion, denial, and frustration, which can disrupt communication and slow down decision-making processes. As resistance intensifies, behavioral responses such as withdrawal, reduced effort, or active opposition emerge, leading to delays in implementation and increased operational costs. Recognizing these

stages allows managers to align their interventions with employee reactions, improving their ability to maintain efficiency throughout the change process.

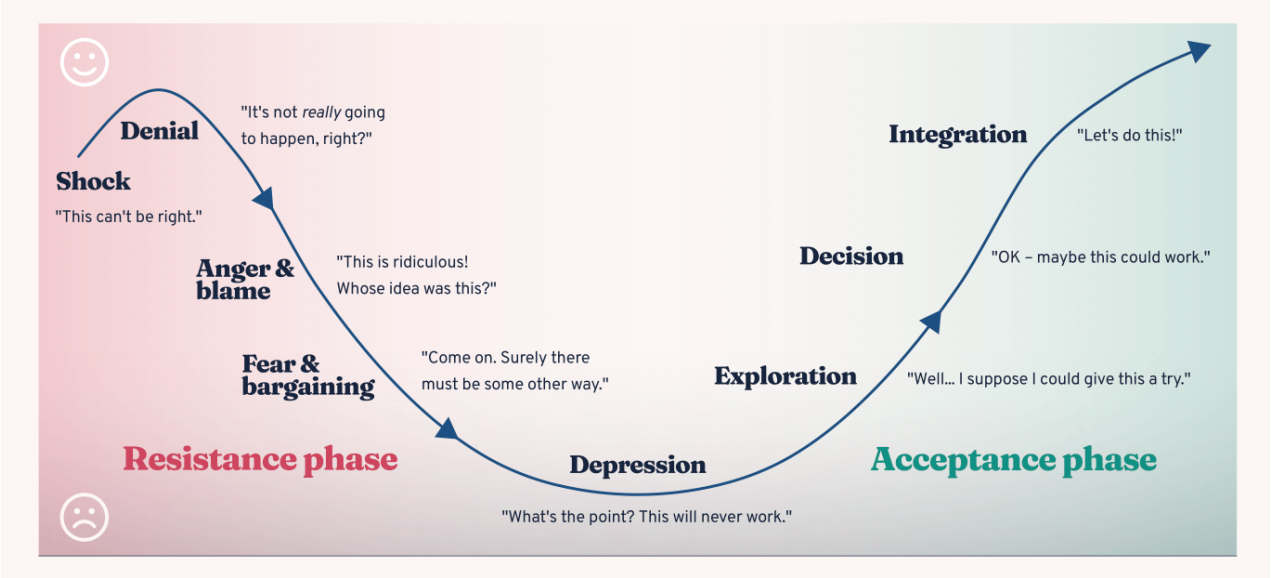


Figure 1. The change curve

Source: Adapted by the author according to Bitesize Learning (2024)

As illustrated in Figure 1, employees typically move from initial shock and denial toward eventual acceptance and integration, passing through critical phases such as frustration, fear, and disengagement. The lowest point of the curve, associated with reduced motivation and uncertainty, represents the stage where management efficiency is most negatively affected, as productivity declines and coordination becomes more difficult. However, as individuals transition toward exploration and decision, engagement gradually improves, enabling recovery in performance and alignment with organizational objectives. This pattern confirms that resistance is a temporary but influential phase, and when properly managed through targeted communication and leadership support, it can facilitate smoother transitions and contribute to improved long-term efficiency outcomes.

Results and Impact

Case studies clearly show that ignoring resistance to change can lead to serious problems. These problems go beyond general inefficiencies and also create risks that are specific to each industry, affecting operations, competitiveness, and long-term success. In the automotive sector, General Motors' (GM) 2009 bankruptcy exemplifies how entrenched resistance rooted in union-driven fears of job losses, rigid adherence to legacy production techniques, and aversion to innovative restructuring increased operational fragility (Errida & Lotfi, 2021). Data from contemporaneous analyses indicate that GM's labor costs ballooned to $74 per hour compared to competitors' $44, fueling a vicious cycle of delayed plant closures, prolonged supplier negotiations, and a 20% erosion in U.S. market share between 2004 and 2008; this resistance not only precipitated a $30 billion government bailout but also limited adaptive innovations like fuel-efficient vehicle lines, prolonging vulnerability to the 2008 financial crisis.

Similarly, in the construction domain, Errida and Lotfi's (2021) action-research case of a Moroccan firm with 300 employees and $35 million in annual sales highlights contrasting outcomes across two project management methodologies (PMM) implementations. The failed initiative suffered from inadequate leadership, sponsorship, and a lack of transparent communication, resulting in unique drawbacks such as 15–20% schedule overruns, escalated material costs due to uncoordinated procurement silos, and a 25% spike in employee turnover among mid-level supervisors, contrasting sharply with the successful rollout, where stakeholder engagement reduced resistance and achieved on-time delivery.

Quantitative evidence from emerging markets further quantifies resistance's toll on performance. In a PLS-SEM analysis of survey data from 230 leaders across Vietnamese listed companies on the Ho Chi Minh Stock Exchange (collected July–September 2024), Nguyen et al. (2024) found that employee resistance to change directly predicts a 79.6% variance in organizational performance decline. Antecedents like transformational leadership, transparent communication, and perceived support explained 57% of resistance variance, but moderation analyses revealed culturally nuanced drawbacks: in high power-distance environments (prevalent in Vietnam), organizational culture amplified the negative effect, leading to heightened compliance-driven inertia and a 12–15% additional drop in return on assets (ROA); conversely, low innovation capability intensified impacts, correlating with 18% slower product development cycles and sector-specific declines in manufacturing firms, where resistance manifested as delayed digital tool adoption amid post-pandemic supply chain pressures.

At the team level, Vakola's (2013) framework shows that strong resistance lowers people's sense of safety and creates isolated groups. This leads to serious problems like ongoing emotional burnout and poor sharing of information. Individually, cognitive rigidity triggers affective stress, reducing personal efficacy by up to 30% during transitions; at the group level, misaligned readiness norms create "echo chambers" of loyalty to outdated practices, diminishing collective problem-solving and elevating conflict by 25–40% in simulated change scenarios; organizationally, this turns into structural inertia, where low readiness continues resource misallocation and limits cross-functional agility unique vulnerabilities evident in prolonged decision loops that delay market responses by quarters.

Ultimately, cultivating strong change readiness yields measurable efficiency gains, as demonstrated in Lines et al.'s (2015) empirical study of U.S. architecture, engineering, and construction (AEC) owner organizations. Their ANOVA and Tukey post-hoc analyses identified six resistance-minimizing factors: project scope clarity, moderate size/duration, realistic implementation timelines, formal change agent designation, and high agent involvement, correlating with 30% faster project execution (e.g., from 24 to 16.8 months) and 25% reductions in rework costs (from 12% to 9% of budgets). Unique drawbacks of low readiness included amplified risks in large-scale projects (> $50 million), where unrealistic speed expectations increased resistance by 22%, leading to 15% higher court cases expenses from contractual disputes; in contrast, organizations with direct change agent roles (e.g., executive sponsors) reported 35% lower employee absence, underscoring how proactive involvement transforms potential silos into collaborative hubs, ultimately safeguarding long-term competitive positioning.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support a causal chain in which resistance acts as a mediating mechanism between organizational change initiatives and performance outcomes. Rather than directly reducing performance, resistance influences intermediate variables such as coordination efficiency, employee engagement, and decision-making quality. This indirect effect explains why similar change initiatives can produce different results across organizations, depending on how resistance is managed. It also highlights the importance of addressing both human and structural factors in change management strategies.

Analysed authors and article alignment

This article aligns with and builds upon the perspectives of the authors reviewed, while adding an integrative, management-focused point of view. Consistent with Oreg (2003) and Szabla (2007), the study recognizes resistance to change as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. Like the analyzed literature, the article highlights that resistance negatively affects organizational performance, slowing decision-making, reducing productivity, and increasing conflict.

Where this article extends prior studies is in emphasizing the practical implications for management efficiency, not just theoretical understanding. While Errida & Lotfi (2021) and Lines et al. (2015) provide case-based evidence on the consequences of unmanaged resistance, this article

synthesizes cross-industry findings and quantifies impacts on both individual and organizational levels. For example, it combines team-level effects identified by Vakola (2013) with real-world case evidence such as General Motors' operational challenges, demonstrating how resistance directly translates into measurable inefficiencies and increased costs.

In contrast to some previous authors who primarily focus on either psychological antecedents (Deng et al., 2023) or leadership interventions (Hussain et al., 2021; Ahmad & Cheng, 2018), this article integrates both perspectives, proposing actionable strategies such as leadership alignment, change champions, procedural fairness, and realistic change pacing. The article also emphasizes the dual nature of resistance, like Nguyen et al. (2024), showing that while resistance often reduces efficiency, it can serve as a valuable feedback mechanism when properly managed.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Research clearly shows that resistance to change is one of the biggest obstacles to running an organization efficiently. Organizations that actively reduce resistance through fair practices, strong leadership support, and employee involvement can implement changes up to 30% faster, cut rework costs by 25%, and improve flexibility and commitment (Lines et al., 2015; Vakola, 2013). These results show that readiness at all levels, individual, team, and organization, is key. When everyone is prepared, resistance becomes useful feedback rather than a problem, helping the organization stay competitive over time.

The analysis demonstrates that resistance to change is not merely an obstacle but a critical determinant of management efficiency that operates across multiple organizational levels. Its effects are both direct, through disruptions in workflow and productivity, and indirect, through its influence on communication, trust, and employee engagement. By framing resistance as a measurable and manageable phenomenon, organizations can shift from reactive problem-solving to proactive performance management during change processes.

Some recommendations for organizations include adapting change strategies to fit their culture and level of innovation. In workplaces with high power-distance (where authority is strongly respected) or low innovation, focus on transformational leadership and clear, open communication to reduce the effects of cultural barriers. Set realistic goals for change, avoiding overly aggressive deadlines or constantly expanding project scope, especially in large initiatives. By following these practical, evidence-based approaches, organizations can turn resistance from a major reason for the typical 60–70% failure rate of change projects into a tool for improving management efficiency. This not only helps changes succeed but also strengthens long-term resilience, making the organization more flexible, cohesive, and ready to adapt in the future.

Despite its negative implications, resistance to change can serve as a diagnostic tool for identifying weaknesses in organizational systems. Signals such as employee dissatisfaction, communication breakdowns, or implementation delays often indicate deeper structural or managerial issues. When interpreted correctly, these signals provide valuable feedback that can improve decision-making and enhance the effectiveness of change initiatives. This dual perspective reinforces the importance of not eliminating resistance entirely, but rather managing it strategically to support long-term organizational performance.

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