

ACCEPTANCE OF CHANGE BY REDUCING EMPLOYEE RESISTANCE AND STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Vveinhardt J., Sedziuviene N.*

Abstract: Change is inevitable but often provokes negative reactions among employees and promotes resistance. Knowledge of the causes of resistance increases the possibility of making appropriate managerial decisions in the change management process and mitigating the rejection of change. In the last decade, Lithuanian colleges operated under the conditions of ongoing reforms. Implemented reforms particularly affect the country's regional colleges experiencing strong external pressure to look for ways of effective operation in fairly difficult conditions, focusing on revenue increases, reductions in expenditure and assurance of the quality of studies. The shortage of potential students, which is related to the steadily declining number of school graduates in the regions, in turn leading to teacher workload reduction, also poses quite a serious threat. The purpose of the study is to identify employee acceptance of change, reduce resistance to it, increase work engagement and strengthen organizational commitment. The research results show that in the case of this sample, work engagement, change management practices and organizational commitment have the greatest impact on employee acceptance of the change. Organizational commitment is related to work engagement by a strong correlation relationship. It is concluded that (1) better acceptance of change depends on participation and work engagement, (2) change management practices depend on change seeking, reaction to change and organizational commitment, (3) organizational commitment depends on cognitive flexibility, communication, participation, individual attention, and work engagement, in turn, (4) work engagement depends on predisposition to change, change seeking, reaction to change, and organizational commitment.

Key words: acceptance of change, change management practices, organizational commitment, work engagement, employee well-being.

DOI: 10.17512/pjms.2022.26.1.22

Article history:

Received August 27, 2022; Revised October 05, 2022; Accepted October 07, 2022

Introduction

Although it is perceived that successful development of organizations, which also determines employee well-being, requires innovation, and most of the modern industrial societies appreciate change seekers, change itself in organizations is met if not by strong internal resistance, then by passive reactions (Aldiabat et al., 2022;

* **Jolita Vveinhardt**, Prof. dr., Vytautas Magnus University, Faculty of Economics and Management; ✉ corresponding author: jolita.vveinhardt@vdu.lt,
ORCID: 0000-0001-6231-9402

Natalija Sedziuviene, Assoc. Prof. dr. Šiauliai State University of Applied Sciences;
✉ e-mail: natalija.sedziuviene@stv.lt,
ORCID: 0000-0001-8387-6371

Oreg et al., 2011). It could be expected that the community of education, of higher education, in particular, should perceive the significance and benefit like no other, although research conducted in various countries shows that the likely benefit of change is not the most important factor promoting support for change and engagement (Chandler, 2013; Sánchez-Prieto et al., 2019). For example, Dlouhá et al. (2017) emphasize that teachers of higher education institutions in Central and Eastern Europe have a lot of knowledge and experience on development progress issues, but progressive change in the region remains relatively slow (Dlouhá et al., 2017). Besides, another study has demonstrated that there are similar barriers to introducing innovations in higher education across different geographical regions (Ávila et al., 2017). In other words, knowledge and competencies are not the only and most important factors. Therefore, the question arises, why the community that draws perspectives of change in both research and educational activities far from always becomes a leader of that change? The answer to the posed question can be twofold. On the one hand, authors investigating change in the Central and Eastern European higher education system draw attention to the context consisting of specific economic and historical circumstances in which higher education operates (Adomßent et al., 2014; Gawlicz and Starnawski, 2018). According to Dobbins and Kwiek (2017), states of this region had to address all modern challenges encountered by Western higher education systems in a much shorter period and under much greater political and economic tensions, while diversification of higher education appears as a long-term goal whose outcome remains uncertain (Dakowska, 2017). In addition, constantly protracted reforms and changing requirements oriented to institutional goals but not ensuring personal well-being perspectives promote disappointment and internal opposition of managerial staff to change (Sedziuviene and Vveinhardt, 2018). Colleges operating in this context are forced to pursue several contradictory goals simultaneously: to ensure high-quality studies with limited resources, remain competitive, and retain competent employees while reducing costs. However, according to Durana et al. (2019), traditional concepts of quality must also include changes and preparation for new challenges. On the other hand, research conducted in different scientific disciplines shows that avoidance of change is inspired by fears of losing control of the situation (Rosenberg, 2018), individual traits determining low receptivity to novelties (Weeks et al., 2004), the feeling of instability or the fear of uncertainty, loss of the current state or perceived negative impact on personal time and workload (Lane, 2007). In addition, emphasis is placed on organizational factors, such as the very organization's readiness for change, including employee beliefs, change appropriateness, benefit, managerial commitment (Holt et al., 2007), and managers' abilities to cope with resistance to change (Bateh et al., 2013), ethical leadership (Metwally et al., 2019), etc. Identification of the causes of resistance increases the possibility to make appropriate managerial decisions in the change management process and to mitigate the rejection of change. A better understanding of the internal factors of resistance to change in the higher education system can help evaluate the response to planned reforms and,

simultaneously, improve their acceptance by applying managerial measures. In this case, the Lithuanian higher education system, to which colleges also belong, can be treated as a kind of “proving ground” of constant reforms. For example, the past two decades have witnessed the launching of a dozen reforms of a greater or lesser extent. Since 2019, funding of higher education institutions has been linked to results and state orders; the performance of higher education institutions has been evaluated by employing foreign experts; the employment of high-level foreign teachers has been financially supported, which increases competition; and universities and colleges have been merged. Along with this, the negatively changing demographic situation determines a steadily declining number of students every year (compared with 2010, the number of students has decreased by about 50%), which forces educational institutions themselves to reduce the number of study programmes and staff. All this causes considerable uncertainty and internal tension. Therefore, the research problem is formulated by the question: What is the employee acceptance of change in colleges, and how it increases work engagement and strengthens organizational commitment in reducing resistance to change? The problem raised is not particularly extensively investigated in scientific papers from the perspective chosen in this study; i.e., it is more common to investigate issues of education policy than internal processes of regional educational organizations. In other words, it is not sufficiently clear how organizations operating in a specific context requiring change deal with internal challenges and which of them play a decisive role. This study aims to identify employee acceptance of change, reduce resistance to it, increase work engagement, and strengthen organizational commitment.

Literature Review

The study conducted by Hoang et al. (2020) has shown that successful implementation of innovations in the organization requires a specific environment characterized by daily interactions between managers, knowledge sharing, an encouraging reward system and autonomy support. All this helps employees to perceive the innovation development atmosphere. Other authors distinguish critically important aspects as employee acceptance of the change (DiFabio and Gori, 2016) and change management practices (Morris et al., 2019; Van der Voet and Vermeeren, 2017; etc.).

Acceptance of Change

Some studies demonstrate that proper organization of processes is important for employee acceptance of change. Tyler and Cremer (2005) found that in cases of organizational mergers, procedurally correct behaviour of managers was perceived as more legitimate and competent. In such cases, employees, especially those with stronger organizational identification, are more likely to accept organizational change. However, individual personality traits are acknowledged as a particularly important factor. For example, DiFabio and Gori (2016) distinguished five aspects whose consideration helps to cope with resistance to change: predisposition to change, support for change, change seeking, positive reaction to change, and

cognitive flexibility. In other words, the critical mass consists of individual personal resources determining reactions to change (DiFabio and Gori, 2016; Di Fabio et al., 2017), although external influence remains important as well. Having summarized the results of research conducted over six decades, Oreg et al. (2011) developed a model in which several significant circumstances interplay: pre-change antecedents (internal organizational context and change recipient characteristics), change antecedents (content, process, perceived harm or benefit), reactions (emotional, cognitive, behavioural), and consequences of change (related to work and personal). However, constructs such as readiness for change, commitment to change, openness and cynicism about change are treated as situational and may change over time along with individuals' experiences. Therefore, they are better perceived as states rather than personality traits (Choi, 2011). Research conducted in different scientific disciplines shows that acceptance of any novelties depends not only on the perception of their benefit for personal well-being – social influence is also important (Ibili et al., 2019; Verma and Sinha, 2018).

Change Management Practices: Communication, Participation and Individual Attention

Research of recent years highlights links between the quality of human resource practices (HRM) (e.g., Morris et al., 2019; Raeder, 2019) with the results of change in organizations of various activity sectors. Raeder (2019) states that the use of a broader range of HRM practices and their careful implementation result in more beneficial outcomes than the change itself (e.g., in terms of perceived job safety). In addition, Morris et al. (2019) pointed out how the entrenched tradition was related to new management practices during change. The survey of leaders of Japanese organizations has shown that new approaches to human resource management operate alongside traditional ones. For example, managers sought to rationalise salary systems, making them more flexible, uncertainty about career, promotion prospects, and marginalization of trade union policy and practice. According to the authors, insights into organizational change should always be contextualized by perceiving a broader relative impact of social, technical, economic, and other environmental forces. Van der Voet and Vermeeren (2017) conducted one of the first studies in the public sector, assessing the role of change management in the implementation process. It has been found that cost reduction is related to less commitment to the organization, but “communication, participation and individual attention during the implementation process may alleviate some of the negative results” (van der Voet and Vermeeren, 2017, p. 247). Another study conducted at a higher education institution by van Niekerk and van Rensburg (2022) showed that middle managers were not inclined to initiate change as they lacked confidence in new positions due to unclear job expectations. This indicates the necessity to nurture relationships; therefore, senior management should provide ongoing support to lower-level employees to lessen initiative-reducing tensions. Attention to employees, communication also reduces the sense of uncertainty that accompanies change (Allen et al., 2007; McKay et al., 2013).

Organizational Commitment

Research conducted by Madsen et al. (2005), Meyer and Allen (1990), Oreg et al. (2011), Van der Voet and Vermeeren (2017) and other authors show the existing relationships between organisational commitment and how change is implemented. On the one hand, although the research method employed by Madsen et al. (2005) did not allow to identify causality, the results enabled the authors to assume that greater commitment to the organization could facilitate preparation for change. Their assumption was confirmed by other studies demonstrating that readiness for change was a multi-level construct in which employee commitment or the resolve to implement change and belief in one's capabilities played an important role (Oreg et al., 2011). Furthermore, according to Straatmann et al., (2018), organizational commitment is directly related to intentions supporting change, and significant influence is made by approaches, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. That is, employees who are more committed to the organization find it easier to accept change. Still, another study investigated direct and indirect relationships between job satisfaction, organizational commitment and attitude to change. It has been found that employees were unequally satisfied with supervision, co-workers, working conditions, safety, salary and promotion, while organizational commitment played a mediating role between various aspects of job satisfaction and different attitudes to organizational change (Yousef, 2017).

Work Engagement

Work engagement is not limited to job performance and employee outcomes; it includes aspects of motivation, desire to continue professional career and is a sustainably positive state of employee well-being (Hakanen et al., 2021), which is related to organizational change by reciprocal relationships. Kalttinen et al. (2020), who studied the organizational merger, found that engagement mitigated threat appraisals, but threats themselves influenced the reduction of engagement. Therefore, the authors recommend promoting employee engagement as early as before initiating change and seeking to reduce threat appraisals throughout the whole change process. Many public sector reforms are related to threats of cutbacks, but their impact on work engagement is ambiguous. As already mentioned, the study conducted by Van der Voet and Vermeeren (2017) showed that cutbacks were not related to work engagement, although Kiefer's et al. (2014) findings demonstrated both positive and negative effects. That is, on the one hand, the increase of change related to cutbacks had a negative effect; on the other hand, the growth of change related to novelties had not only a less negative but also a positive effect on employee engagement.

Thus, considering that employee reactions to change may depend on different factors and based on research results, the following questions were raised: (Q1) What factors can increase acceptance of change in the non-university higher education community? (Q2) Which variables have the greatest influence on increasing the impact of change management practices in the non-university higher education

community? (Q3) What factors in the process of change increase work engagement and organizational commitment of the non-university higher education community?

Research Methodology

Sample

In the last decade, Lithuanian colleges operated under the conditions of ongoing reforms. Implemented reforms particularly affect the country's regional colleges experiencing strong external pressure to look for ways of effective operation in fairly difficult conditions, focusing on revenue increases, reductions in expenditure, and assurance of the quality of studies. The shortage of potential students, which is related to the steadily declining number of school graduates in the regions, in turn leading to teacher workload reduction, also poses quite a serious threat. Therefore, due to the particularly difficult situation of regional colleges, colleges of the country's big cities were not included in this study; i.e., only Lithuania's regional colleges were chosen. Out of 23 colleges operating in the country, the sample included 5 colleges operating in regional centres with a population of less than 100,000. The survey involved administrative staff, lecturers, service staff and infrastructure maintenance staff. It should be noted that in this study, the researchers did not aim to make a comparison between the situation of colleges of big cities and regional colleges of Lithuania, but it would make sense to do so in the future.

Procedures

After obtaining the consent of top managers to conduct the survey in their colleges, invitations to participate in the study were sent out, emphasizing the principle of free participation, guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality, and committing to publish data only in a summary form. The data of this study were collected by interviewing 258 employees working in five Lithuanian colleges; i.e., the respondents that took part in the study represented the non-university higher education sector. The size of the organizations involved in the study varied from 106 to 185 employees; i.e., the mean number of employees of colleges surveyed is 148, and the total number is 740. Thus, when the level of confidence is 95 percent, and the margin of error is 5 percent, 253 respondents had to be interviewed. The survey involved 264 respondents, but the number of fully completed questionnaires was 258 (6 questionnaires were rejected), which is comparable with the 97.7% complete. After adapting scales to the Lithuanian language, the questionnaire was placed on the online survey platform pollmill.com. The survey was conducted by distributing only the electronic survey link (the survey started during the quarantine announced in the country when work in educational institutions was conducted remotely). While creating the electronic version of the questionnaire, protections were set, allowing only one response from the computer with the same IP address. Protections were also enabled to prevent the selection of the same response ratings.

Measures

To perform the survey, the following scales were selected: The Acceptance of Change Scale (ACS) (DiFabio and Gori, 2016), Change Management Practices (van

der Voet and Vermeeren, 2017; Herold et al., 2008), Organizational Commitment (van der Voet and Vermeeren, 2017), Work engagement (van der Voet and Vermeeren, 2017). The Acceptance of Change Scale (ACS) (DiFabio and Gori, 2016) consists of 5 subscales encompassing 20 items: Predisposition to change, Support for change, Change seeking, Positive reaction to change, and Cognitive flexibility. The reliability of the scales, calculated using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, indicated good values of internal consistency: Predisposition to Change, $\alpha = 0.83$, in the case of this study, $\alpha = 0.85$; Support for Change, $\alpha = 0.79$, in this study, a significantly lower value was obtained; i.e., $\alpha = 0.65$; Change seeking, $\alpha = 0.80$, in this study, a significantly higher value was obtained; i.e., $\alpha = 0.86$; Positive reaction to change, $\alpha = 0.75$, in this study, also, $\alpha = 0.75$; Cognitive flexibility, $\alpha = 0.72$, in this study, a insignificantly higher value was obtained; i.e., $\alpha = 0.77$. "The Acceptance of Change Scale (ACS) is a brief and easily administered instrument with good psychometric properties that can promote the development of clients' strengths and the growth of a sense of Self, thereby helping them choose their own way without losing any opportunities in their lives and their work" (DiFabio and Gori, 2016, p. 1). The Change Management Practices Scale (van der Voet and Vermeeren, 2017) consists of 3 subscales encompassing 6 items. Subscales of Van der Voet and Vermeeren (2017) were drawn based on Herold's et al. (2008) Leadership Scale (subscales: Transformational Leadership – 22 items, Change Leadership – 7 items). Subscales of Voet and Vermeeren (2017): Communication, Participation, and Individual attention for employees (6 items); i.e., two items were used to measure each of the three process-related characteristics. The three subscales mentioned in this study were supplemented with the statements formulated by the authors of the article; i.e., now, each subscale consists of 4 statements instead of two (Communication, $\alpha = 0.83$; Participation, $\alpha = 0.87$; Individual attention, $\alpha = 0.85$). The Organizational Commitment Scale (van der Voet and Vermeeren, 2017) encompasses 6 items. To measure organizational commitment, the authors used the scale, which is in line with the concept of affective commitment of Meyer and Allen (1990) (OC-24), containing subscales: Affective commitment – 8 items, Continuance commitment – 8 items, Normative commitment – 8 items). Answers were to be given using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). All the standardized loadings were statistically significant, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the measure was $\alpha = 0.88$; in the case of this study, $\alpha = 0.92$. The Work Engagement Scale (van der Voet and Vermeeren, 2017) contains 9 items. To measure work engagement, the authors used the scale that is largely based on Schaufeli's et al. (2006) Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9). Answers were to be given to the items in this scale using the 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). All the standardized loadings were statistically significant; i.e., $\alpha = 0.93$ (the result obtained in this study is $\alpha = 0.94$).

In the case of our study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient also indicated good values of internal consistency: Predisposition to change (0.85), Support for change (0.65),

Change seeking (0.86), Positive reaction to change (0.75), Cognitive flexibility (0.77), Communication (0.83), Participation (0.87), Individual attention (0.85), Organizational commitment (0.92) and Work engagement (0.94).

Research Results

Socio-demographic Characteristics. Socio-demographic variables include gender, age, seniority, position and region. There are more female representatives in the higher education system in Lithuania, and this difference is even more pronounced in Lithuanian colleges. Therefore, the percentage distribution by gender is also uneven in this study: 23.3% of males and 76.7% of females, corresponding to national indicators. Research participants were divided into four age groups: young (18-34 years old – 15.5%), middle-aged (35-44 years old and 45-54 years old – 25.6% and 28.3%, respectively), older and the oldest (55-65 years old and older – 30.6%). The distribution of respondents by age groups corresponds to the trends of employees of Lithuanian colleges, as most of the research participants work as lecturers, and the lecturer in the college must have a Master's degree; therefore, the youngest research participants' group corresponds to the overall Lithuanian indicator with regard to college employees. Thus, with the exception of the group of research participants classified as "young" in this study, the remaining age groups are considered to be homogeneous. Persons aged 18 to about 23-24 can only take other positions, i.e., positions of service staff. Seniority in the current workplace was divided into four groups: up to 3 years – 13.2%, 3 to 10 years – 31.4%, 10 to 20 years – 33.3% and over 20 years – 22.1%. The distribution of respondents by seniority shows that persons working in regional colleges are long-term employees. Groups of distribution by seniority correspond to distribution by age groups when employees working up to 3 years constitute the least numerous group. Research participants, according to their positions, are divided into the following three groups: lecturers – 46.1%, administrative staff – 31.4% and service staff – 22.5%.

Regression analysis. It must be noted that the independent variable organizational commitment was statistically reliable in all cases, related to all dependent variables, and the strongest relationship was found between OC and CPM ($\beta = 0.722$, $\beta^2 = 0.726$). Of course, the fact that other statistical values were smaller does not negate its role and only indicates a slightly lower "weight". Meanwhile, work engagement was related by similar medium-strength statistically reliable relationships only with ACS and OC. In turn, quite weak relationships were found between WE and predisposition to change, change seeking and positive reaction to change. It should be noted that such individual trait as predisposition to change was not important for ACS and CMP, during cognitive flexibility for CPM and WE. On the other hand, personal change-seeking was related to CPM, OC and WE, although relationships were not strong. Relationships of independent variables with ACS, CMP, OI, and WE are unfolded in Table 6.

Table 1. Relationships between ASC, CMP, OI and WE

Dependent variable – Acceptance of Change (ACS)	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ² revised	<i>Reliability</i>
	0.691	0.477	0.467	0.000
Independent variable	Non-Standardized Beta coefficient	Standardized Beta coefficient	t	ANOVA reliability
(Constant)	1.879		13.017	0.000
COM. Communication	0.035	0.059	0.660	0.510
PAR. Participation	0.261	0.453	4.817	0.000
IA. Individual attention	0.007	0.011	0.118	0.906
OC. Organizational Commitment	-0.222	-0.348	-4.236	0.000
WE. Work engagement	0.425	0.559	8.870	0.000
Dependent variable – Change Management Practices (CMP)	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ² revised	<i>Reliability</i>
	0.829	0.687	0.678	0.000
Independent variable	Non-Standardized Beta coefficient	Standardized Beta coefficient	t	ANOVA reliability
(Constant)	0.524		2.325	0.021
CPR. Predisposition to change	-0.030	-0.024	-0.462	0.645
CSP. Support for change	0.115	0.080	1.686	0.093
CSK. Change seeking	0.113	0.120	2.617	0.009
CRE. Positive reaction to change	0.190	0.153	2.983	0.003
CF. Cognitive flexibility	0.070	0.053	1.082	0.280
OC. Organizational Commitment	0.722	0.726	13.912	0.000
WE. Work engagement	-0.110	-0.092	-1.620	0.107
Dependent variable – Organizational Commitment (OC)	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ² revised	<i>Reliability</i>
	0.860	0.740	0.730	0.000
Independent variable	Non-Standardized Beta coefficient	Standardized Beta coefficient	t	ANOVA reliability
(Constant)	0.521		2.319	0.031
CPR. Predisposition to change	0.031	0.025	0.514	0.607
CSP. Support for change	-0.077	-0.053	-1.226	0.221
CSK. Change seeking	-0.186	-0.196	-4.787	0.000
CRE. Positive reaction to change	-0.101	-0.080	-1.692	0.092
CF. Cognitive flexibility	0.151	0.114	2.524	0.012
COM. Communication	0.186	0.197	3.090	0.002
PAR. Participation	0.210	0.231	3.367	0.001
IA. Individual attention	0.210	0.213	3.187	0.002
WE. Work engagement	0.496	0.414	9.140	0.000
Dependent variable – Work engagement (WE)	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ² revised	<i>Reliability</i>
	0.784	0.615	0.601	0.000
Independent variable	Non-Standardized Beta coefficient	Standardized Beta coefficient	t	ANOVA reliability
(Constant)	0.471		2.108	0.047
CPR. Predisposition to change	0.214	0.203	3.581	0.000
CSP. Support for change	0.073	0.061	1.149	0.252
CSK. Change seeking	0.112	0.142	2.763	0.006
CRE. Positive reaction to change	0.145	0.139	2.425	0.016
CF. Cognitive flexibility	-0.035	-0.032	-0.577	0.565
COM. Communication	-0.005	-0.006	-0.073	0.942
PAR. Participation	-0.108	-0.143	-1.684	0.093
IA. Individual attention	0.022	0.027	0.323	0.747
OC. Organizational Commitment	0.510	0.611	9.140	0.000

Note: R – set correlation coefficient; R² – aggregate coefficient of certainty (coefficient of determination).

To determine the influence of independent variables, regression equations were developed:

$$ACS = 1.879 + 0.261 * PAR - 0.222 * OC + 0.425 * WE.$$

$$CMP = 0.524 + 0.113 * CSK + 0.190 * CRE + 0.722 * OC.$$

$$OC = 0.521 - 0.186 * CSK + 0.151 * CF + 0.186 * COM + 0.210 * PAR + 0.210 * IA + 0.496 * WE.$$

$$WE = 0.471 + 0.214 * CPR + 0.112 * CSK + 0.145 * CRE + 0.510 * OC.$$

ACS. Performing the regression analysis, when the dependent variable is acceptance of change, it should be stated that the strongest (1) effect on acceptance of change is made by work engagement – the recorded correlation relationship is 0.559; i.e., moderate correlation. Strong (2) effect on employee willingness to accept change is made by employee participation – the correlation relationship of 0.453 was identified. The weaker (3) the organizational commitment, the higher the acceptance of change – correlation with the minus sign was obtained in this sample (-0.348); thus, it should be assumed that employees accept change more easily when organizational commitments decrease. In summary, while participation and work engagement improve separately one by one, organizational commitment weakens, and other remaining variables remain unchanged, acceptance of change improves.

CMP. Performing the regression analysis, when the dependent variable is change management practices, it should be stated that change management practices will work best when: (1) employees are committed to their organization (strong correlation of 0.726); i.e., change management practices affect employees' organizational commitment, (2) employees positively react to change (0.153), (3) employees themselves seek change (0.120). In summary, when change seeking, reaction to change, and organizational commitment individually one after another increase and the remaining variables remain unchanged, the impact of change management practices increases.

OI. The regression analysis when the dependent variable is organizational commitment shows that the most important variables for the growth of employees' organizational commitment are: (1) work engagement (0.414), (2) participation (0.231), (3) individual attention (0.213), (4) communication (0.197), and (5) cognitive flexibility (0.114). The weaker change seeking, the greater the organizational commitment – the negative correlation was obtained in this sample (-0.196). Therefore, it can be assumed that employees have a stronger commitment to the organization when they are not particularly strongly seeking change. In summary, as cognitive flexibility, communication, participation, individual attention, and work engagement individually improve, change-seeking weakens, and other remaining variables remain unchanged, organizational commitment improves.

WE. Performing the regression analysis where the dependent variable is work engagement, the results show that the following independent variables have the greatest impact on employees' work engagement: (1) organizational commitment (correlation 0.611), (2) predisposition to change (0.203), (3) change seeking (0.142),

and (4) positive reaction to change (0.139). To sum up, as predisposition to change, change seeking, reaction to change, and organizational commitment increase individually, while the rest remain unchanged, work engagement increases.

Discussion

In order to determine employee acceptance of change while reducing resistance to change, increasing work engagement, and strengthening organizational commitment in higher education organizations, the researchers distinguished several factors. Although some previous studies showed that acceptance of change is increased by organizational commitment (Iverson, 1996; Yousef, 2017), the results of the study did not confirm the such effect (Q1). On the contrary, even in such cases, when organizational commitment declines, acceptance of change can remain favourable or even increase if sufficient attention is paid to employee participation and work engagement. For example, Molino et al. (2020) found that work engagement was one of the factors that enabled them to accept innovations better. Although organizational commitment implies greater attachment to the organisation and willingness to remain in it, change and uncertainty causes can confront personal goals and promote resistance. Prolonged reforms in education cause constant tension and uncertainty, and organizations themselves are limited in making long-term commitments to employees. For example, the study of Siekkinen et al. (2017) notes that insecurity is important for researchers' intentions to leave the job, even if it is attractive to them. In addition, the meta-analysis performed by Costanza et al. (2012) revealed that younger generation representatives generally tended to leave their organizations. In other words, employee work engagement and participation can be certain measures that at least partially offset decreasing trends common to the organisation, which does not necessarily depend on the organization itself.

Another important aspect of applying change management is not only its impact on introducing innovations but also the conditions under which these practices can be more effective (Q2). Van der Voet and Vermeeren (2017) found that three change management practices (communication, participation and individual attention) were positively related to employee organizational commitment, while participation and individual attention were positively related to work engagement. Meanwhile, the present study demonstrates that change management practices are positively related not only to organizational commitment but also to change-seeking and reactions to change. However, support for change and work engagement did not significantly impact. True, this study did not directly address cutbacks, but on the one hand, this shows that organizational commitment remains an important factor. On the other hand, it notes that both personal approaches and individual reactions are important circumstances making up the environment that may aggravate the implementation of change management practices. Besides, such trait as organizational flexibility is often associated with resistance to change (Chung et al., 2012; Wirtz et al., 2016), but the results show that this only affected organizational commitment but was not important for change management practices and work engagement. All of this

enables to better understand how higher education organizations can prepare and implement change in practice, reducing potential resistance. For example, to achieve that change management practices work and serve the purpose, leaders of higher education organizations should focus their efforts most on fostering employees' organizational commitment, encouraging their positive reaction to change, and increasing the very employees' willingness to seek change. In addition, employees' weaker change-seeking does not mean that employees will be less committed to the organization, but this may reduce their work engagement.

This study enables to understand how employees of higher education organizations (colleges) accept change and what factors increase their work engagement and organizational commitment (Q3). Key factors positively influencing change in four dimensions have been identified: (1) better acceptance of change depends on participation and work engagement, (2) change management practices depend on change seeking, reaction to change, and organizational commitment, (3) organizational commitment depends on cognitive flexibility, communication, participation, individual attention and work engagement, and in turn, (4) work engagement depends on predisposition to change, change seeking, reaction to change, and organizational commitment.

Conclusion

The study revealed ambiguous effects of organizational commitment and work engagement during change. Greater organizational commitment does not guarantee better acceptance of change because change, especially if it is incomprehensible, can endanger the long-term goals of employees themselves, and seeking to maintain the status quo promotes resistance. However, commitment positively affects work engagement, which in turn can increase organizational commitment and indirectly pertains to the efficiency of change management practices. Thus, when implementing change in higher education organizations, it is important to consider that to increase employees' organizational commitment, the very employees' work engagement, participation, individual attention paid to them, assurance of communication, and employees' cognitive flexibility are of the utmost importance. The study shows guidelines for managers of non-university higher education organizations operating in small regional centres on how to form human resource management policy that would enable a more flexible response to the reforms in the educational system. Although individual factors are important in the development of resistance to change, their evaluation and a greater focus on employees can improve acceptance of change. This study is useful for researchers analysing this field, who look for ways to improve readiness for change and facilitate its acceptance in educational organizations. In addition, it provides knowledge to politicians and institutions organizing reforms, which encourages them to pay attention to colleges' readiness for change, that is, preparing for the reform; first of all, investments should be made in optimizing the institutions' management. Identification of the interaction

between organization of such educational reforms and acceptance of change could be the object of further research.

The results of the study presented in this article cover employees of regional colleges in only one country. Reactions of scientific and managerial personnel were also not analysed separately. Nevertheless, managerial staff and their attitudes significantly impact how subordinates engage in change (Kiesnere and Baumgartner, 2019); therefore, it makes sense to further investigate the influence of different levels of management. For example, Oreg et al. (2011) believe that by transferring at least part of the research focus to the change agents' actions and reactions, the literature could help provide a different view of change recipients' roles compared with the change agent. It would be appropriate to continue the study by conducting the questionnaire survey involving: (1) employees of all colleges in the country; i.e., not only regional but also colleges of large cities; (2) employees of not only public but also private colleges in the country; (3) employees of colleges and universities in the country. It would also make sense to compare with other countries by conducting surveys using the same instrument. Finally, a survey of leaders of higher education institutions, conducted employing qualitative research methods, would help to form an overall picture.

References

- Adomßent, M., Fischer, D., Godemann, J., Herzig, C., Otte, I., Rieckmann, M. and Timm, J. (2014). Emerging areas in research on higher education for sustainable development – management education, sustainable consumption and perspectives from Central and Eastern Europe. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 62(1), 1-7.
- Aldiabat, B. F., Aityassine, F. L. and Al-rjoub, S. R. (2022). Organizational development and effectiveness: testing the mediating role of resistance to change. *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, 25(1), 58-71.
- Allen, J., Jimmieson, N. L., Bordia, P. and Irmer, B. E. (2007). Uncertainty during Organizational Change: Managing Perceptions through Communication. *Journal of Change Management*, 7(2), 187-210.
- Ávila, L. V., Filho, W. L., Brandli, L., Macgregor, C. J., Molthan-Hill, P., Özuyar, P. G. and Moreira, R. M. (2017). Barriers to innovation and sustainability at universities around the world. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 164, 1268-1278.
- Bateh, J., Castaneda, M. E. and Farah, J. E. (2013). Employee Resistance to Organizational Change. *International Journal of Management and Information Systems (IJMIS)*, 17(2), 113-116.
- Chandler, N. (2013). Braced for Turbulence: Understanding and Managing Resistance to Change in the Higher Education Sector. *Management*, 3(5), 243-251.
- Choi, M. (2011). Employees' attitudes toward organizational change: A literature review. *Human Resource Management*, 50(4), 479-500.
- Chung, S.-H., Su, Y.-F. and Su, S.-W. (2012). The Impact of Cognitive Flexibility on Resistance to Organizational Change. *Social Behavior and Personality: an International Journal*, 40(5), 735-745.

- Costanza, D. P., Badger, J. M., Fraser, R. L., Severt, J. B. and Gade, P. A. (2012). Generational differences in work-related attitudes: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 27(4), 375-394.
- Dakowska, D. (2017). Competitive universities? The impact of international and European trends on academic institutions in the 'New Europe'. *European Educational Research Journal*, 16(5) 588-604.
- Di Fabio, A., Gori, A. (2016). Developing a New Instrument for Assessing Acceptance of Change. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 802.
- Di Fabio, A., Palazzeschi, L. and Bucci, O. (2017). In an Unpredictable and Changing Environment: Intrapreneurial Self-Capital as a Key Resource for Life Satisfaction and Flourishing. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 1819.
- Dlouhá, J., Glavič, P. and Barton, A. (2017b). Higher education in Central European countries – Critical factors for sustainability transition. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 151, 670-684.
- Dlouhá, J., Vintar Mally, K. and Dlouhý, J. (2017a). ESD principles in higher education from a perspective of Central and Eastern European countries. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 18(6), 822-840.
- Dobbins, M., Kwiek, M. (2017). Europeanisation and globalisation in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe: 25 years of changes revisited (1990–2015). *European Educational Research Journal*, 16(5), 519-528.
- Durana, P., Kral, P., Stehel, V., Lazaroiu, G. and Sroka, W. (2019). Quality Culture of Manufacturing Enterprises: A Possible Way to Adaptation to Industry 4.0. *Social Sciences-Basel*, 8(4), 124.
- Gawlicz, K., Starnawski, M. (2018). Educational policies in Central and Eastern Europe: legacies of state socialism, modernization aspirations and challenges of semi-peripheral contexts. *Policy Futures in Education*, 16(4), 385-397.
- Hakanen, J. J., Rouvinen, P. and Ylhäinen, I. (2021). The Impact of Work Engagement on Future Occupational Rankings, Wages, Unemployment, and Disability Pensions—A Register-Based Study of a Representative Sample of Finnish Employees. *Sustainability*, 13(4), 1626.
- Herold, D. M., Fedor, D. B., Caldwell, S. D. and Liu, Y. (2008). The effects of change and transformational leadership on employees' commitment to change: A multilevel study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(2), 346-357.
- Hoang, G., Wilson-Evered, E. and Lockstone-Binney, L. (2020). Leaders influencing innovation. A qualitative study exploring the role of leadership and organizational climate in Vietnamese tourism SMEs. *Employee Relations*, 43(2), 416-437.
- Holt, D. T., Armenakis, A. A., Feild, H. S. and Harris, S. G. (2007). Readiness for Organizational Change: The Systematic Development of a Scale. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 43(2), 232-255.
- Ibili, E., Resnyansky, D. and Billinghamurst, M. (2019). Applying the technology acceptance model to understand maths teachers' perceptions towards an augmented reality tutoring system. *Education and Information Technologies*, 24, 2653-2675.
- Iverson, R. D. (1996). Employee acceptance of organizational change: the role of organizational commitment. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 7(1), 122-149.
- Kaltainen, J., Lipponen, J., Fugate, M. and Vakola, M. (2020). Spiraling work engagement and change appraisals: A three-wave longitudinal study during organizational change. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 25(4), 244-258.

- Kiefer, T. J., Conway, H. N. and Briner, R. B. (2014). Feeling the Squeeze: Public Employees' Experiences of Cutback-and Innovation-related Organizational Changes Following a National Announcement of Budget Reductions. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 25(4), 1279-1305.
- Kiesnere, A. L. Baumgartner, R. J. (2019). Sustainability Management in Practice: Organizational Change for Sustainability in Smaller Large-Sized Companies in Austria. *Sustainability*, 11(3), Article Number: 572.
- Lane, I. F. (2007). Change in Higher Education: Understanding and Responding to Individual and Organizational Resistance. *Journal of Veterinary Medical Education*, 34(2), 85-92.
- Madsen, S. R., Miller, D. and John, C. R. (2005). Readiness for organizational change: Do organizational commitment and social relationships in the workplace make a difference? *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 16(2), 213-234.
- McKay, K., Kuntz, J. R. C. and Näswall, K. (2013). The Effect of Affective Commitment, Communication and Participation on Resistance to Change: The Role of Change Readiness. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 42(2), 29-40.
- Metwally, D., Ruiz-Palomino, P., Metwally, M. and Gartzia, L. (2019). How Ethical Leadership Shapes Employees' Readiness to Change: The Mediating Role of an Organizational Culture of Effectiveness. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 2493.
- Meyer, N. J., Allen, J. P. (1990). The measurement and antecedents of affective, continuance and normative commitment to the organization. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 63(1), 1-18.
- Molino, M., Cortese, C. G. and Ghislieri, C. (2020). The Promotion of Technology Acceptance and Work Engagement in Industry 4.0: From Personal Resources to Information and Training. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(7), 2438.
- Morris, J., Hassard, J., Delbridge, R. and Endo, T. (2019). Understanding managerial work in the modern Japanese firm: The influence of new organizational forms and changing human resource management practices. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*. Article Number: UNSP 0143831X19875785.
- Oreg, S., Vakola, M. and Armenakis, A. (2011). Change Recipients' Reactions to Organizational Change: A 60-Year Review of Quantitative Studies. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 47(4), 461-524.
- Raeder, S. (2019). The role of human resource management practices in managing organizational change. *Gio-Gruppe-Interaktion-Organisation-Zeitschrift Fuer Angewandte Organisationspsychologie*, 50(2), 169-191.
- Rosenberg, A. (2018). Taking apart structural change: The constitutive role of communication in relieving tensions. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 26(2), 368-381.
- Sánchez-Prieto, J. C., Huang, F., Olmos-Migueláñez, S., García-Peñalvo, F. J., and Teo, T. (2019). Exploring the unknown: The effect of resistance to change and attachment on mobile adoption among secondary pre-service teachers. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 50(5), 2433-2449.
- Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B. and Salanova, M. S. (2006). The measurement of work engagement with a short questionnaire: A cross-national study. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 66(4), 701-716.
- Sedziuviene, N., Vveinhardt, J. (2018). The Reactions of post-Soviet countries employees to changes carried out by organizations in higher education: cases of Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Belarusian state college. *Montenegrin Journal of Economics*, 14(4), 225-235.

- Siekkinen, T., Kuoppala, K., Pekkola, E. and Välimaa, J. (2017). Reciprocal commitment in academic careers? Finnish implications and international trends. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 7(2), 120-135.
- Straatmann, T., Nolte, J. and Seggewiss, B. (2018). Psychological processes linking organizational commitment and change-supportive intentions. *Personnel Review*, 47(2), 403-424.
- Tyler, T. R., Cremer, D. B. (2005). Process-based leadership: Fair procedures and reactions to organizational change. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(4), 529-545.
- Van der Voet, J., Vermeeren, B. (2017). Change Management in Hard Times: Can Change Management Mitigate the Negative Relationship Between Cutbacks and the Organizational Commitment and Work Engagement of Public Sector Employees? *The American Review of Public Administration*, 47(2), 230-252.
- Van Niekerk, K., van Rensburg, M. J. (2022). Middle Managers' Strategising Practices to Effect Strategic Change. *Journal of Change Management*, 22(3), 273-291.
- Verma, P. Sinha, N. (2018). Integrating perceived economic wellbeing to technology acceptance model: The case of mobile based agricultural extension service. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 126, 207-216.
- Weeks, W. A., Roberts, J., Chonko, L. B. and Jones, E. (2004). Organizational Readiness for Change, Individual Fear of Change, and Sales Manager Performance: An Empirical Investigation. *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, 24(1), 7-17.
- Wirtz, B. W., Piehler, R., Thomas, M. J. and Daiser, P. (2016). Resistance of Public Personnel to Open Government: A cognitive theory view of implementation barriers towards open government data. *Public Management Review*, 18(9), 1335-1364.
- Yousef, D. A. (2017). Organizational Commitment, Job Satisfaction and Attitudes toward Organizational Change: A Study in the Local Government. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 40(1), 77-88.

AKCEPTACJA ZMIAN POPRZEZ ZMNIEJSZENIE OPORU PRACOWNIKÓW I WZMOCNIENIE ZAANGAŻOWANIA ORGANIZACYJNEGO

Streszczenie: Zmiana jest nieunikniona, ale często wywołuje negatywne reakcje wśród pracowników i sprzyja oporowi. Znajomość przyczyn oporu zwiększa możliwość podejmowania właściwych decyzji menedżerskich w procesie zarządzania zmianą i łagodzenia odrzucenia zmiany. W ostatniej dekadzie uczelnie litewskie funkcjonowały w warunkach trwających reform. Wdrażane reformy szczególnie dotyczą uczelnie regionalne w kraju, które doświadczają silnej presji zewnętrznej, by szukać sposobów efektywnego działania w dość trudnych warunkach, koncentrując się na zwiększeniu dochodów, ograniczeniu wydatków i zapewnieniu jakości studiów. Poważnym zagrożeniem jest również niedobór potencjalnych studentów, związany z systematycznie malejącą liczbą absolwentów szkół w regionach, co z kolei prowadzi do zmniejszenia obciążenia pracą nauczycieli. Celem badania jest określenie akceptacji pracowników dla zmian, zmniejszenie oporu wobec nich, zwiększenie zaangażowania w pracę oraz wzmocnienie zaangażowania organizacyjnego. Wyniki badań pokazują, że w przypadku tej próby największy wpływ na akceptację zmiany przez pracowników mają: zaangażowanie w pracę, praktyki zarządzania zmianą oraz zaangażowanie organizacyjne. Zaangażowanie organizacyjne jest związane z zaangażowaniem w pracę silną zależnością a korelacyjną. Stwierdzono, że (1) lepsza

akceptacja zmiany zależy od uczestnictwa i zaangażowania w pracę, (2) praktyki zarządzania zmianą zależą od poszukiwania zmiany, reakcji na zmianę i zaangażowania organizacyjnego, (3) zaangażowanie organizacyjne zależy od elastyczności poznawczej, komunikacji, uczestnictwa, uwagi indywidualnej i zaangażowania w pracę, z kolei (4) zaangażowanie w pracę zależy od predyspozycji do zmian, poszukiwania zmian, reakcji na zmiany i zaangażowania organizacyjnego.

Słowa kluczowe: akceptacja zmiany, praktyki zarządzania zmianą, zaangażowanie organizacyjne, zaangażowanie w pracę, dobrostan pracowników.

通过减少员工阻力和加强组织承诺来接受变革

摘要: 变革是不可避免的，但往往会激起员工的负面反应并助长抵制情绪。对阻力原因的了解增加了在变革管理过程中做出适当管理决策并减少对变革的拒绝的可能性。在过去十年中，立陶宛大学在持续改革的条件下运作。已实施的改革尤其影响到承受强大外部压力的国家地区性大学，它们在相当困难的条件下寻找有效运作的方法，重点是增加收入、减少支出和保证学习质量。潜在学生短缺与地区学校毕业生数量持续下降有关，进而导致教师工作量减少，也构成了相当严重的威胁。该研究的目的是确定员工对变革的接受程度，减少对变革的抵制，增加工作参与度并加强组织承诺。研究表明，在这个样本案例中，工作投入、变革管理实践和组织承诺对员工接受变革的影响最大。组织承诺通过强相关关系与工作投入相关。得出的结论是 (1) 更好地接受变革取决于参与和工作投入，(2) 变革管理实践取决于变革寻求、对变革的反应和组织承诺，(3) 组织承诺取决于认知灵活性、沟通、参与，反过来，个人关注和工作投入，(4) 工作投入取决于对变化的倾向、寻求变化、对变化的反应和组织承诺

关键词: 接受变革、变革管理实践、组织承诺、工作投入、员工福利