

# The Role of Communication in Managing Resistance to Change

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this research is to analyze the role of communication in the effective management of resistance to change within IT organizations in Romania. Failures can have multiple causes, including insufficient and incomplete communication, which can lead to resistance. To fulfill the purpose of this research, we applied a questionnaire to a sample of 100 employees. Following the research, we found that face-to-face meetings are the most effective in communicating organizational changes, emphasizing the importance of direct dialogue. Strategies such as recognizing successes, transparent communication, and continuous feedback are critical to managing this resistance. In addition, it emphasizes the importance of clearly communicating the goals and benefits of change, as well as the development and distribution of detailed explanatory materials to facilitate organizational transitions. Communication is not the only key factor in successful organizational change, so the data cannot be generalized.*

**Key words:** communication, resistance to change, effective communication, face-to-face communication, feedback

**J.E.L. classification:** D83, L21, M15, M51

## 1. Introduction

Communication plays an essential role in organizations. The organization is like a dynamic system of interactions, which means that communication contributes to the formation and support of organizational goals, with members encouraging and inspiring each other to achieve goals (Guetzkow, 2013). The role of communication in managing resistance to change is a crucial topic within modern organizations. Communication is recognized as a relevant dimension for the success of organizational change, essential in building readiness for change, reducing uncertainty and obtaining commitment (Matos and Esposito, 2014).

At the same time, effective communication is often the key to the success of implementing organizational changes. Effective communication plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of organizational change. This involves much more than simply transmitting information; it is a complex process that influences how changes are perceived, understood and accepted by employees. In addition, effective communication improves organizational relationships and minimizes strikes and lockouts (Musheke and Phiri, 2021). In a digitized and globalized world, organizations must continuously adapt to external changes, and organizational changes such as downsizing, restructuring, mergers and acquisitions are serious challenges (Schulz-Knappe *et al.*, 2019).

## 2. Theoretical background

Continuous change is a constant in organizations, a topic widely addressed in the management and organizational literature (Elving, 2005). Resistance to change in organizations is a common phenomenon and one of the biggest obstacles in the process of implementing change. This can take many forms, from passive resistance, such as delaying or ignoring demands, to active resistance, including vocal opposition or sabotage. Understanding and effectively managing resistance to change is crucial to the success of any organizational transformation initiative (Erwin and Garman, 2010).

Resistance can be caused by fear of the unknown, loss of control, impact on stable routines, or the perception that change is not necessary or beneficial. In some cases, resistance may be related to lack of trust in leadership or previous negative experiences (Bailey and Raelin, 2015). Clear, open and ongoing communication about the nature of the change, the reasons behind it and the expected benefits can help reduce uncertainty. Communication is a reciprocal process that facilitates the exchange of intangible resources and contributes to feelings of satisfaction. This communication operates at the level of the organization, the leader and colleagues, having a direct impact on employee satisfaction (Curado *et al.*, 2022). So, the effective management of change processes is vital for the survival of organizations (Schulz-Knappe *et al.*, 2019).

### 3. Research methodology

Failures can have multiple causes, including insufficient and incomplete communication, which can generate resistance (Schulz-Knappe *et al.*, 2019). The purpose of this research is to analyze the role of communication in the effective management of resistance to change within IT organizations in Romania. Through this research, it aims to identify ways in which communication strategies can be optimized to facilitate employees' adaptation to organizational changes and to minimize resistance to these changes. To fulfill the purpose of this research, we applied a questionnaire to a sample of 100 employees.

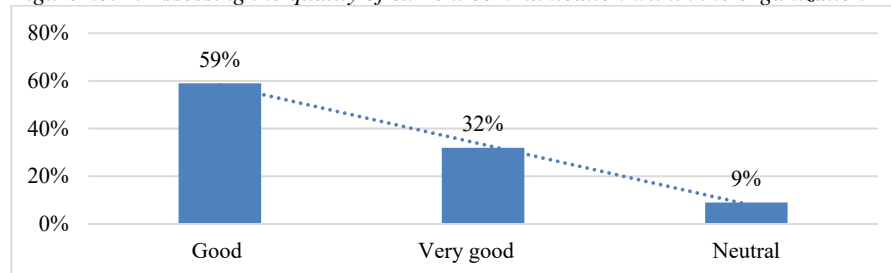
The questionnaire was designed to assess and understand how communication in the context of organizational change is perceived and managed by IT employees. By collecting and analyzing data from these 100 IT employees, the research aims to provide a deep understanding of how communication influences organizational change management and develop recommendations based on proven IT practices. This information will help develop more effective communication strategies tailored to the specific needs and challenges facing business leaders in today's era.

The questionnaire was administered online between October 7 and 19, 2023, being accessible through selected groups on LinkedIn and Facebook. The survey instrument was created using Google Forms, and the processing and analysis of the responses was performed using Microsoft Excel. In the questionnaire, topics such as: evaluation of current communication, experience with organizational changes, the impact of communication on resistance and communication strategies.

### 4. Findings

To question no. 1, *how do you rate the quality of current communication within your organization*, the majority of respondents (59%) consider the quality of communication in their organization to be "Good". This suggests that, for the most part, communication meets employee expectations by being effective and clear. However, there is room for improvement, as the perception did not reach the "Very Good" level. Also, 32% of the respondents evaluate the communication as "Very good". This indicates a high level of satisfaction with how information is conveyed and interaction within the organization. This positive perception can be an indicator of a strong organizational culture and effective communication leadership. While only 9% of respondents have a "Neutral" perception of the quality of communication. This could suggest that there is a segment of employees who are neither completely satisfied nor dissatisfied with communication in the organization.

Figure no. 1. Assessing the quality of current communication within the organization

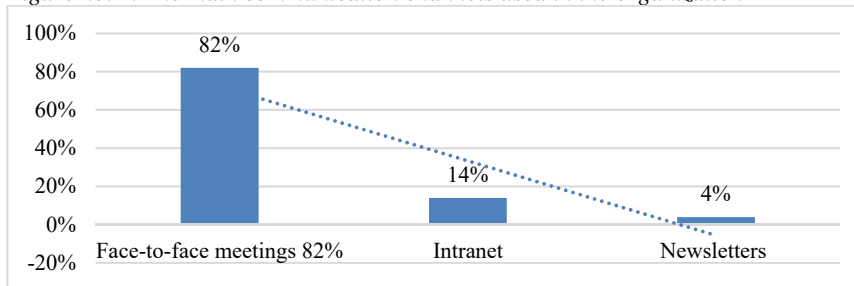


Source: Author's contribution

The results indicate a predominantly positive perception of communication in the organization, with the majority of respondents rating it as "Good" or "Very good". However, there are opportunities for improvement, especially to transform neutral perceptions into more positive ones and to raise the overall level of satisfaction. The organization could benefit from a more detailed analysis of the feedback to specifically identify and address the needs and expectations of its employees.

Regarding question 2, *which are the main communication channels used in your organization to communicate changes*, 82% of respondents suggest that, in the context of communicating changes, face-to-face meetings are considered the most effective. They enable immediate dialogue, clarify questions on the spot and ensure a better understanding of changes. Face-to-face meetings can also be more effective in addressing employee emotions and reactions to change. The intranet was mentioned by 14% of respondents. This method represents a smaller portion of the communication. Although the intranet is useful for quickly and efficiently distributing information throughout the organization, it seems that it is not considered as effective as face-to-face meetings for managing change. This could be due to its more impersonal nature and lack of direct interaction. Newsletters were mentioned by 4% of respondents. This is the least used method. Newsletters, whether digital or printed, are a one-way communication channel and may not be sufficient to convey the complexity or nuance of changes in an organization. They can be useful for general updates, but seem to be less effective for detailed discussions or addressing specific employee concerns.

Figure no. 2. The main communication channels used in the organization

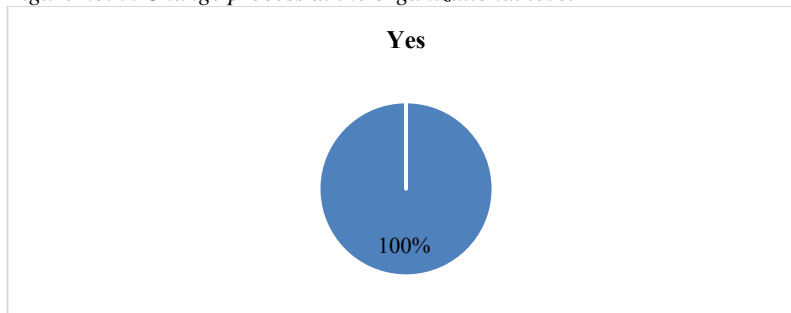


Source: Author's contribution

In the context of conveying change in an organization, direct and personal interaction is by far preferred. This emphasizes the importance of face-to-face communication in managing change and addressing employee concerns, while digital and one-way channels are considered less effective for this purpose. This is also supported by the study by Battiston et al. (2020).

Regarding question no. 3, *in the last 3-5 years have you been involved in an organizational change process*, all respondents indicated that they were involved in an organizational change process in the last 3-5 years.

Figure no. 3. Change process at the organizational level

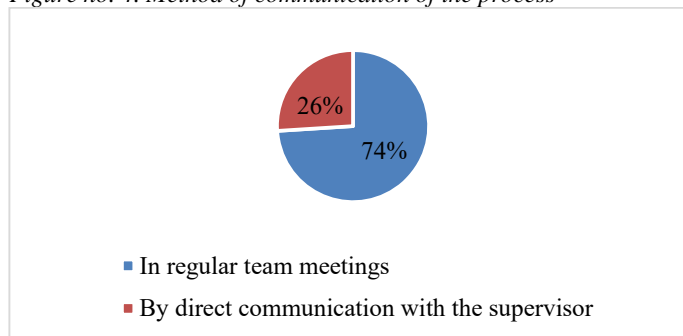


Source: Author's contribution

The types of changes can range from organizational restructuring, changes in leadership, implementation of new systems or technologies, to changes in work processes or strategies. The fact that all respondents were involved in such processes shows the diversity and complexity of the changes. A universal involvement in change processes can have a significant impact on employees. On the one hand, it can mean that the organization encourages the engagement and adaptability of its employees. On the other hand, it can also indicate possible challenges in managing change and employee reactions to it. Participating in change processes gives employees the opportunity to learn and develop professionally. This can be positive for career development, but it can also be challenging, requiring flexibility and adaptability. Given universal involvement, the organization could benefit from obtaining detailed feedback from employees about change processes to improve how they are managed in the future.

For question 4, *if yes, how was this change process communicated to you*, 74% of respondents indicated that they were informed about changes in regular team meetings. This suggests that team meetings are an important channel for communicating information and discussing change. The use of regular team meetings to communicate change shows a preference for structured and collective approaches. These meetings provide the opportunity to discuss changes in a group setting, allowing for dialogue, questions and feedback in a more formalized and organized environment. 26% of respondents indicated that the change process was communicated directly by their supervisors. This means that a significant part of the communication about changes is done through a more personal and direct approach. Direct communication with the supervisor can allow more specific or personal aspects of the change to be addressed, giving employees the opportunity to discuss individual concerns and receive clarification tailored to their needs.

Figure no. 4. Method of communication of the process

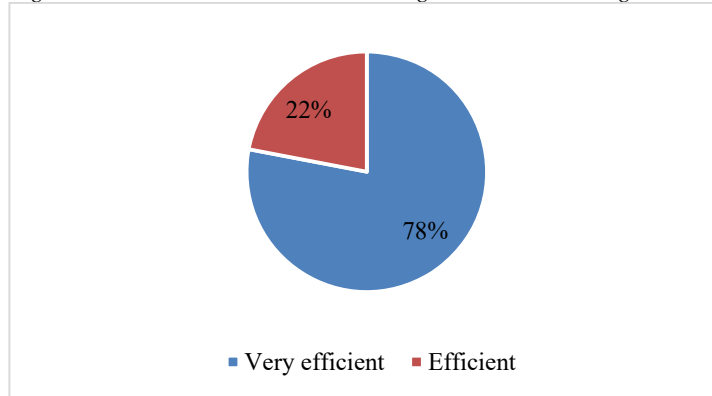


Source: Author's contribution

These results indicate an organizational preference for a structured and collective communication of changes, with an important role also given to individual communication through supervisors. This suggests a balanced approach to managing organizational change communication.

To question no. 5, *in your experience, how effective is communication in reducing resistance to change*, 78% of respondents consider communication to be "very effective" in reducing employee resistance to change. This suggests that, in their experience, the communication strategies implemented by the organization are highly effective in facilitating the transition and acceptance of change. This high level of effectiveness may indicate that the organization places great emphasis on clear, transparent, and timely communication, addressing employee concerns and providing them with the information necessary to understand and adapt to change. 22% of respondents consider communication to be "effective," meaning that they still see a positive impact of communication on reducing resistance to change, but perhaps not at the optimal or ideal level. This may suggest that although communication strategies are generally good, there is still room for improvement in how and effectively changes are communicated.

Figure no. 5. Communication in reducing resistance to change

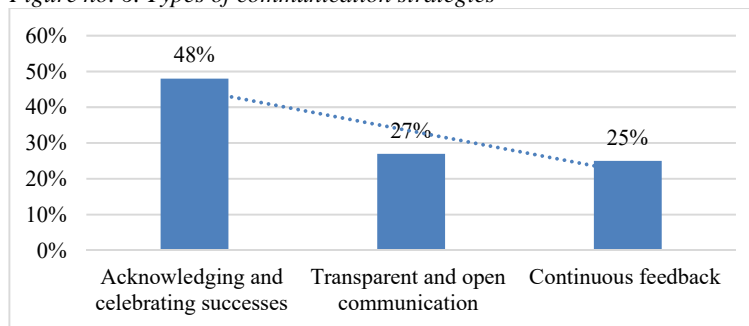


Source: Author's contribution

These data suggest that in this organization, communication is considered a highly effective tool in reducing employee resistance to change, with the recognition of opportunities for continuous improvement.

Regarding question 6, *what types of communication strategies do you think are most effective in managing resistance to change*, the majority of respondents (48%) believe that recognizing and celebrating successes are the most effective strategies in managing resistance to change. This suggests that validating employees' efforts and achievements in the context of change is extremely valuable. Celebrating successes can help boost morale, promote a sense of achievement and build confidence in the change process. This approach can also help create a positive environment and recognize individual and team contributions. 27% of respondents see transparent and open communication as very effective in addressing resistance to change. Transparency and openness in communication are essential to ensure that employees understand the reasons and details of the changes. This can reduce uncertainty and build trust as employees feel informed and involved in the process. 25% of respondents consider continuous feedback to be essential in managing resistance to change. This involves a two-way communication process where employees not only receive information but also provide feedback. The strategy of providing and asking for feedback on a regular basis can help identify and address employee concerns, adjust change strategies based on feedback received, and create a sense of engagement and ownership.

Figure no. 6. Types of communication strategies



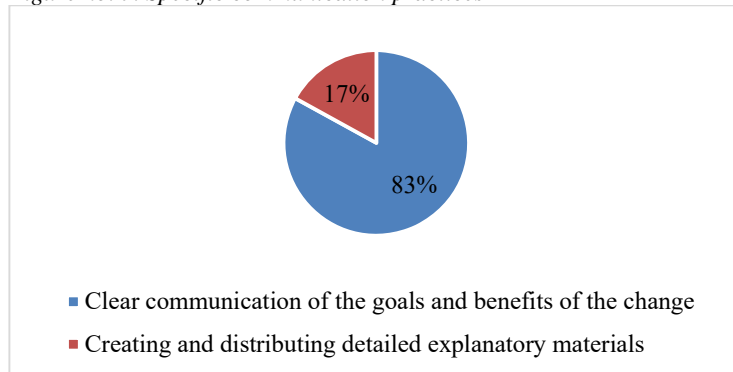
Source: Author's contribution

These results indicate a preference for communication strategies that value engagement, recognition, and transparency. All of these approaches help create an environment where employees feel valued, informed, and engaged, which can significantly reduce resistance to change. These strategies can be particularly effective in an organizational environment experiencing frequent or significant change, as they help create a sense of security and stability in the midst of transformation.

For question 7, *what specific communication practices would you recommend to facilitate organizational transitions*, 83% of respondents recommend clear communication of the goals and benefits of the change. This suggests that employees see significant value in clearly understanding

the reasons behind the changes and how they will improve the organization or their personal situation. Effective communication of goals and benefits can help align employees with the organization's vision and reduce resistance by explaining the purpose and anticipated positive impact of the changes. While 17% of respondents suggest the use of detailed explanatory materials as a communication practice in organizational transitions. This includes creating and distributing documents, presentations or other materials that provide detailed information about the changes that are about to take place. These materials can serve as reference resources for employees, helping them understand and adapt to change in a more autonomous way.

Figure no. 7. Specific communication practices



Source: Author's contribution

Employees highly value clear and transparent communication, as well as access to detailed resources to help them understand and adapt to organizational change. These practices are considered essential for facilitating effective transitions and supporting employees in these processes.

## 5. Conclusions

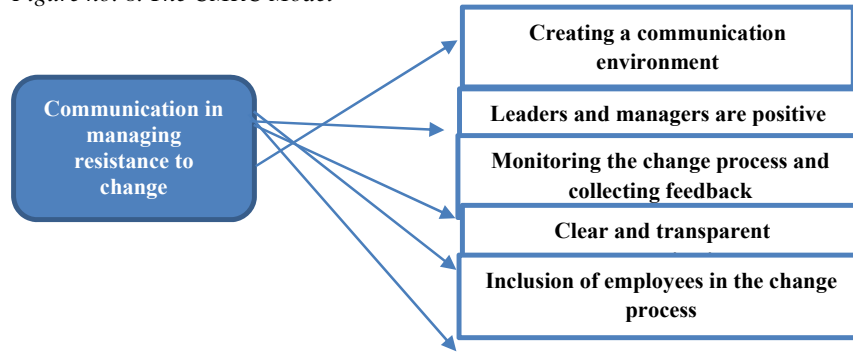
The purpose of this research was to analyze the role of communication in the effective management of resistance to change within IT organizations in Romania. In order to fulfill the purpose of this research, we applied a questionnaire to a sample of 100 IT employees from Romania.

Following the application of the research, we found that a particularly important role of communication in the effective management of resistance to change within IT organizations in Romania is played by face-to-face meetings, they are considered the most effective communication channel for transmitting changes, being preferred by a large majority of employees. This emphasizes the importance of direct interaction and personal dialogue in the change process. The intranet and newsletters play a secondary role in communicating the changes. Although useful for quickly distributing information, they are not as effective as face-to-face meetings.

All respondents were recently involved in organizational change processes, indicating a constant dynamic of change within the organization. Most employees find communication a very effective tool in reducing resistance to change. This highlights the importance of effective communication in managing organizational change. Acknowledging and celebrating successes, transparent and open communication, and continuous feedback are seen as key strategies in managing resistance to change.

Clear communication of the goals and benefits of change, along with the creation and distribution of detailed explanatory materials, are considered essential practices for facilitating organizational transitions. Starting from these conclusions, we formulated the following model for improving communication in the management of resistance to change.

Figure no. 8. The CMRC Model



Source: Author's contribution

In figure 8, I have created the CMRC model (acronym for communication in managing resistance to change). Thus, creating an environment where employees can voice concerns and ask questions about the change is vital. Two-way communication helps identify points of resistance and develop collaborative solutions. It is also important to provide a forum for questions and concerns, allowing employees to express their feelings and concerns. Involving employees in the change process by asking for their opinions and ideas can increase a sense of ownership and buy-in.

Active participation can help identify potential solutions and tailor change to the organization's specific needs. Providing the necessary training and resources can help employees understand how to adapt to change and develop the necessary skills.

Emotional support and acknowledgment of employee concerns are also important. Leaders and managers play a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards change. Leaders must be positive role models, show commitment to change and effectively manage any resistance. Monitoring the change process and collecting regular feedback can help identify problems early and adjust plans as needed. Feedback can provide valuable insights into how change is perceived at different levels of the organization. Clear and transparent communication about the nature of the changes, the reasons behind them and their impact on employees is essential. Transparency reduces uncertainty and anxiety, two elements that often fuel resistance.

Communication must be structured to facilitate employees' understanding of how they will be affected by the changes and what steps are needed to adapt. This includes explaining the benefits of the change to employees and the organization. Organizational leaders must be well trained to effectively communicate change. This includes training them in communication techniques and making sure they have the information they need to answer employee questions. Ongoing communication about the progress and results of changes helps manage expectations and maintain morale.

It is important to recognize achievements and adjust communication based on feedback received. Effective use of digital channels and communication platforms can support the rapid and effective dissemination of information as well as the collection of feedback. Including employees in the change process through open communication increases ownership and reduces resistance because employees feel valued and engaged. Building a positive narrative around the change and emphasizing the long-term benefits can motivate employees and reduce opposition. Communication is not the only key factor in successful organizational change, so the data cannot be generalized.

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