## University of Sopron Alexandre Lamfalussy Faculty of Economics

## CHANGE MANAGEMENT SURVEYS ON HUNGARIAN ORGANIZATIONS

Theses of the PhD Dissertation

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### 1. Research background

Changes that focus on the individual play a major role in maintaining and strengthening competitiveness. Organizations reach their set-out equilibrium through the joint effort of leaders and employees. However, the success of organizational changes may be hindered if employees do not want to change their usual processes or routines because organizational changes require extra effort, and behavioural or skill changes. To change from the current stable situation to a temporary state means overcoming more and more extensive and complex changes, in which the leaders' aim is to effectively implement the changes, achieve the set goals successfully and increase the organizational competitive advantage. Compared to the previous years, the life cycle of products has become shorter and the background processes of services have become more complex. Therefore, it seems that the implementation of successful changes requires more and more preparedness and new knowledge.

### 2. Goals and Research hypotheses

By considering the complex nature of the research topic from different aspects, the *primary objective* of the dissertation is to examine the Hungarian practice with the highlights of the existing causal relationships. The dissertation covers the following topics:

- The joint examination of the magnitude of challenge in organizational changes and the extent of employees' resistance, as well as the employees' age and their resistance.
- The examination of the relationship between organizational culture and managerial challenges.
- The analysis of the importance of motivation and communication in managing organizational changes.
- The preference of theoretical and practical knowledge of leaders in implementing changes.
- The connection between the motivating force of leaders and the recognition of innovations.
- The examination of the relationship between the expansion of employees' knowledge and the knowledge of strategy.

Based on in-depth interviews with leaders of Hungarian organizations, the *secondary goal* is to explore the attitude of Hungarian employees towards organizational change and to reveal the underlying causes and influencing factors that determine their behaviour.

A *further objective* is to highlight the existing connections and to make suggestions to the more smooth management of future changes based on the experiences.

Mainly for reasons of maximum length, it is *not the purpose* to examine the topic on the basis of other important aspects, like the technical implementation of changes or the examination of financial results.

The factors involved in the author's research have been selected on the basis of the impact of their presence or absence on achieving goals. The factors at the level of the organizational unit exert their influence either directly or indirectly, locally and beyond its boundaries, but they are

also related to each other. Therefore, system-oriented, complex thinking is essential for entire organizations.

In order to explore the connections – after analysing the literature of change management models – the author has set up the following research hypotheses:

- H1: The extent of employees' resistance to change is not influenced by the magnitude of challenge in organizational changes. (The same degree of resistance is exerted by the less challenging changes than the more complex ones.)
- H2: Age affects the magnitude of resistance. Old people are more resistant than younger ones.
- H3: The leaders of organizations with competing culture face greater difficulties in making changes to implement.
- H4: Both motivation and communication have a positive effect on the effectiveness of changes, but currently, motivation has a stronger impact.
- H5: Changes in which the leaders prefer theoretical knowledge are as successful as those with practical knowledge.
- H6: During organizational changes, leaders consider the employees' practical knowledge more important than their theoretical knowledge.
- H7: Those leaders who are able to sufficiently motivate their employees are more likely to recognize the employees' suggestions for change and development.
- H8: Employees primarily study for their own purposes besides work and less for achieving the company's strategic goals. (The strategy is mostly unknown for them.)

### 3. The Content and Methodology of the Research

The research consist of a theoretical and an empirical part. The theoretical background, relying on the models and the results of previous Hungarian surveys, pays special attention to the key member of the changes: the person. The range of the respondents in the empirical research was composed of Hungarian graduate employees (207 people). Analyses were made among senior managers (20 people, 27.40%) and mid-level managers (53 people, 72.60%) – that is 35.3% of the total sample. The author carried out the analyses on the basis of the collected data using statistical-mathematical methods with the assistance of SPSS 20 software package. The relationship between the variables was examined by Chi-square test. In addition, further analyses were performed with the Mann-Whitney test (rank-sum test). The author examined the relationship between the two groups with Spearman's rank correlation. In order to explore deeper connections and preserve objectivity, the quantitative research method was complemented with qualitative method to make the research more reliable and credible. The indepth interviews (11 interviews) with managers have revealed the behaviour of employees resulting from changes, the possible causes of employees' behaviour and their attitudes towards changes.

#### 4. The Results of the Research

Based on the synthesis of the literature and the collective examination of the qualitative and the quantitative research methods, the author reached the level of cognition, where the complex dynamics of the system can be clearly recognized and understood.

# T1. The author has found that there is a linear relationship between the extent of employees' resistance to change and the magnitude of challenge in organizational changes, that is, if employees consider the change as a greater challenge, they will react with greater resistance.

Statistical analyses resulted in a weak significant correlation (p = 0.000) between the extent of employees' resistance to change and the magnitude of challenge (0.380). Furthermore, the rank correlation (r = 0.391) - that examined of causal relationship – showed almost the same result as the associative index (0.380), which also confirmed the correlation between the two variables.

Qualitative research have also confirmed the results of quantitative research. Leaders always take resistance into account in terms of organizational changes (value is not zero), meaning that even small-scale changes seem to cause resistance from employees. The extent of employees' resistance is influenced by their attitude towards changes, the most determining reasons of which are their individual concerns, their personal interests and desire for security. Further factors that influence attitudes are the socialization of employees, personality, abilities and skills, as much as, the nature of the tasks and the level of trust in the organization. In addition, the lack of knowledge or competencies increases the sense of challenge, and indirectly contributes to the increase of resistance. From the causes related to management, both the inadequate use and the absence of the essential change management competencies increase the resistance. *The hypothesis has not been confirmed*, but led to new knowledge.

### T2. The assumption according to which age affects the magnitude of resistance and old people are more resistant than younger ones has been partially confirmed.

The correlation analysis for the study of the relationship between the age and the extent of resistance did not prove a significant relationship (p = 0.087). However, the interviewees formed a much more negative opinion, assuming that the older generations are more resistant to changes. Older employees often do not respond with resistance at first, but they would like to compare the expected changes with their experience so far. If they feel that they have not been properly involved or at least not heard, it will increase their resistance. In the case of younger workers, the reason for resistance is considered to be the insecurity that derives from the lack of essential knowledge for change. It can be also seen that the employee's stage of life is not exclusive, but it is a significant influencing factor in terms of resistance. However, employees who already have personal experience consider changes to be a lesser challenge, therefore they respond with less resistance.

By the resistance of employees towards change, it can be stated that nowadays individual concerns, personal interests or desire for security are more decisive factors than age. In addition,

it is heavily task-dependent, which also cannot be linked to age. *The hypothesis has been partially confirmed, and partly not.* 

### T3. The leaders of organizations with competing culture face greater difficulties in making changes to implement.

The Chi-square test performed on the observation unit did not prove a significant correlation (p = 0.176), but the Mann-Whitney test resulted in significant difference (p = 0.019) between the ranks formed by the average of the two groups. The rank average (47.90) of organizations with competing culture is higher than the rank average (34.18) of collaborative groups. The indepth interviews with managers further strengthened the results of the questionnaire survey, according to which it is more difficult to manage changes - that affect the internal cooperation and the relationship of employees to each other - in a competitive environment. In the case of Hungarian employees, mostly interests dominate, which means that there is more competition between groups, while cooperation within a group is more typical.

For competing groups, the reason for the difficulties is that the individual interest dominates instead of the group interest. Today's leaders take the fact into account that the difference between team members' individual gains and group interest can lead to conflicts, disagreements, or even internal conflicts within groups. Overcoming these conflicts cause further problems besides the ad hoc problems occurring by the implementation of changes. Further reasons, like the lack of risk-taking, initiative, or lack of responsibility make the implementation of changes more difficult. However, cohesive groups manage unexpected situations more accepting and more flexible, and its members are more open to new knowledge as a result of the knowledge that is based on trust and the open flow of information. Therefore, employees cause fewer difficulties and problems for their leaders. *The hypothesis has been confirmed.* 

### T4. Both motivation and communication have a positive effect on the effectiveness of changes, but currently, motivation has a stronger impact.

The Chi-square test did not prove a significant correlation between the variables of managerial communication and efficiency (p=0.241), but the Mann-Whitney test showed a significant difference (p=0.031). The rank average is higher by those organizations, where the leader provides information to the employees about the changes regularly (108.71) than by organizations that do not follow this tendency (88.83). Among the variables of motivation and effectiveness, the Chi-square test resulted in a weak significant (Somer d=-0.210) correlation (p=0.013). In addition, the Mann-Whitney test showed a significant difference (p=0.001) between the two independent groups. Furthermore, the average of rankings is higher by organizations (112.38), where the leader motivates the employees than by those organization, where leader do not motivate (82.96). This result shows that if leaders use the means of motivation, then changes are more effective. Moreover, it can be also seen that motivation has a stronger connection with effectiveness than communication in itself, because the rank average for motivational leaders is higher (112.38) than those who rather focus on communication (108.71).

In the case of the present employees, financial motivation has the greatest driving force (p = 0.000). According to preliminary research, the most important factor was the financial motivation of those doing physical work, but in the case of the graduate employees participating in the research, a significant correlation (p = 0.000) has been proven. However, there was no significant relationship regarding intangible motivation, that is, changes are less effective by organizations, where leaders use other intangible motivational tools. Based on the cluster analysis of the combined impact of the two factors, it can be stated that the average of the 'motivating but not communicating' group of leaders is higher (3.59) than the average of the 'non-motivating but communicating' group (3.11).

According to the survey participants, the effectiveness of the changes is positively influenced by financial motivation, intangible assets only motivate for a certain period of time, although this should be true the opposite way.

Based on the in-depth interviews, the most successful changes are those where managers use financial motivation as opposed to where they do not use it. However, the effect of regular communication and proper information is not debatable, but lacking internal motivation, effective communication in itself is unsuccessful. Overall, the two factors together improve efficiency, but the effect of motivation is stronger. *The hypothesis has been confirmed*.

## T5. Changes in which the leaders both prefer theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge are more successful than those, where leaders only prefer theoretical or practical knowledge.

60% of the survey participants believe that the most effective changes are those, where leaders consider both theoretical and practical knowledge as important. The Chi-square test showed weak (Cramer V = 0.370) significant (p = 0.009) correlation between the preferred knowledge and the success of implementation. In addition, based on the Mann-Whitney test (U = 379.000) there is a significant difference (p = 0.010) in efficiency. The rank average is lower (28.07) by managers, who emphasize the importance of practical knowledge than for those who consider both knowledge important (40.03). Moreover, it was also observable that the interviewees consider both knowledge important to the successful implementation of changes, i.e. changes that need the more significant practical knowledge of employees are more successful than changes which need to be implemented with the assistance of employees with theoretical knowledge. While theoretical expertise is more determining in daily work, the success of special type of changes is mostly enhanced by the proficiency of employees. *The hypothesis has not been confirmed*.

# T6. During organizational changes, leaders consider the employees' practical knowledge more important than their theoretical knowledge. Furthermore, the relative importance of theoretical and practical knowledge is different, most of all the higher proportion of practical knowledge can be highlighted.

54.8% of the leaders participating in the questionnaire survey consider both knowledge as important, 39.7% prefer tacit and the lowest 5.5% of them prefer explicit knowledge. There are differences in occupation activities regarding the assessment of knowledge that is essential for organizational changes. The relative importance of the correlation between explicit and tacit

knowledge is different. By way of example, in the case of a road transport company, the practice-theory ratio is 90-10%, whereas a manager in the automotive segment believes that a balanced professional profile would be ideal, as shortcomings can lead to loss of time in project implementation. It can be observed that in addition to the specific characteristics of different occupational branches, practical knowledge is predominantly in a higher proportion than explicit knowledge. *The hypothesis has been confirmed*.

## T7. Those leaders who are able to sufficiently motivate their employees are more likely to recognize the employees' suggestions for change and development.

Statistical analyses showed a medium (Cramer V=0.562) significant correlation (p = 0.000) between the variables of managerial motivation and the recognition of employees' suggestion for development. Additionally, interviewees also found that there is a relationship between the leaders' ability to motivate and the recognition of employees' suggestion for development. It is important for employees at every stage of organizational change to receive regular feedback, recognize their development and personal interest, and appreciate their innovative suggestions. This requires a positive leadership attitude that encourages employees. It is also observable that facilitating the willingness for innovation is leadership-dependant. The carried-out rank correlation test showed twice as strong relationship (r = 0.710) between motivation and the support of developmental suggestions than between financial motivation (r = 0.336; r = 0.335) and the recognition of suggestions for development. Thus, managers who consciously use intangible motivation recognize employees' suggestions for change and development more than those who tend to use material motivation. The research has proven that those leaders who are able to motivate their employees sufficiently, are more open to new ideas and developmental suggestions, thus further facilitate future innovations. *The hypothesis has been confirmed*.

# T8. In the last few years, a significant number of employees considered it necessary to extend their explicit knowledge, but they primarily study for their own purposes besides work and less for achieving the company's strategic goals. (The strategy is mostly unknown for them.)

According to the quantitative research, 44.0% of the employees studied further while working, 49.5% of them were able to recall their organization' strategy from memory. The rate is similar (40.6%) for those who have not learned but still know the strategy (51.2%). However, from mid-level and senior managers (73 people), 67.1% (49 people) were able to recall organizational strategy from memory, 53.1% of them studied besides work and 40.8% did not. In addition, the Chi-square test showed no significant correlation by the examination of neither the whole sample (p = 0.205) nor the observation unit (p = 0.180). According to the in-depth interviews, the purpose of studying beside work is not to support the achievement of organizational goals. The ability to study is present in Hungarian employees, but mostly individual motivations influence knowledge acquisition, the self-interest and individual aspirations of the people concerned dominate. Overall, the employees' attitudes towards changes are influenced by the past experience of trust, the changes of labour market, and the organizational culture. *The hypothesis has been confirmed*.

#### 5. New and novel scientific results

The dissertation *is recent* in the way that based on a set of criteria defined after the literature review of models, *it reveals the change management practices of organizations, focusing on the connections and correlations with systems theory* (since it affects many areas). Research that explores the changes from different aspects have already been conducted, but such complex study of current Hungarian practice has not yet been carried out.

All the research carried out so far has confirmed the existence of resistance, but it has not been studied in the context of challenge. A new research finding is that there is a linear relationship between the magnitude of the deemed challenge and the degree of resistance, that is, employees' resistance increases to the same extent as personal and organizational interests conflict with each other. In other words, employees see change as equally challenging. On the other hand, the research did not support the often-made assumption of managers according to that employees are as resistant to small tasks as they are to major changes. Their reaction results from the combined effect of several factors.

Leaders of organizations with competing culture face greater challenges in implementing changes. A recent result is that Hungarian organizations have developed collaborative culture in the main, therefore the extent of difficulties faced by the leaders in the occurring changes is not significant. The collaborative culture for everyday work also brings benefits when it comes to making changes to be implemented.

Although both motivation and communication have a positive effect on the effectiveness of changes, research has shown that motivation has a stronger impact and is more effective than communication. However, it is important to note that the lack of communication worsens the impact of motivational measures.

The new result of the research is that the relative importance of theoretical and practical knowledge required for change differs, mostly the higher proportion of practical knowledge can be highlighted. While leaders consider both theoretical and practical knowledge important for success, employees give higher priority to practical knowledge. This causes tension between expectations and reality on both sides.

According to the empirical research, the knowledge needed for innovation is given in organizations, i.e. the employees are highly qualified therefore it is the leaders' responsibility to bring the knowledge to the surface. Those leaders who are able to sufficiently motivate their employees are more likely to recognize the employees' suggestions for change and development.

A new result of the research is that in the last few years, a significant number of employees considered it necessary to extend their explicit knowledge, but they primarily study for their own purposes and less for achieving the company's strategic goals. (The strategy is mostly unknown for them.)

The outcomes of the research revealed that the organization-specific elements of motivation, communication, cooperation, innovation-friendly environment and training best exert their effect in a coordinated system, so that the organization can increase and retain its competitive advantage.

### 6. Conclusions, suggestions

Assuming that changes and reorganizations planned by the management must be carried out by the employees, the management has to calculate with conflicts of interest and resistance. Employees will respond based on their attitudes towards changes, so the more challenging they think the change will be, the greater their resistance will be. The outcome of such a situation is not beneficial for either side, so it is important for both sides to make effort to strive for and maintain balance. The research revealed that the current causes of employees' attitudes towards organizational changes are their socialization, individual concerns, abilities and tacit knowledge or proficiency, desire for security and the challenge of the task.

If the management takes into consideration the influencing, resistance-reducing factors already at the stage of planning the changes than they can also positively influence or completely form the employees' attitudes towards change by using appropriate tools, like Scrum or Kanban. One of the benefits of the methods is that the willingness to cooperate improves. In addition, another approach to change employees' attitudes towards workplace and changes is based on flow theory.

Besides the tools for changing attitudes, it is important to understand and consider individual interests to an extent that organizational interest are not impeded. A collaborative organizational culture enhances the success of managing changes and reduces the burden on managers.

It can be stated that today's leaders strive to provide more positive working conditions for their employees and work on maintaining an organizational culture that supports internal collaboration, furthermore they strengthen teamwork from the beginning to the end of changes. They already take it into consideration at the beginning of planning the changes that the informal network will also change. Also, the different interests and group reactions of the members are taken into account in the change process. After the industry-wide use of lean paradigm, the thoughtful use of agile methodologies that have been proven by software developers can bring further success in the service and support areas in the future. The alleviation of impedimental formalities, customer-centricity, the quickening of the results, as well as the enhanced collaboration with external stakeholders and the strengthening of successful teamwork among internal organizational members are all beneficial for organizations. For more successful and effective cooperation, leaders must guide with appropriate methods that fit the particular situation, to which the strengthening of the group's value system and the reducing of conflicts can be added in the case of changes. In addition to creating teams based on agile methodology, the author suggests the creation of a work environment that fosters flow.

Besides the supervision of daily operation, organizational culture is not a challenge for today's leaders, not even if they face additional tasks arising from changes because they strive to create a collaborative atmosphere at the beginning of the changes. In fact, the members of a collaborative team reduce the difficulties that leaders face in connection with making changes by performing tasks in a mutually supportive way and sharing their knowledge that is essential for change.

It can be stated that it is advisable for managers to get to know the individual motivation of their subordinates in order to raise the interest for enthusiasm and desire. Motivation should always be based on abilities and personality, even by changing the motivational system. One of the typical problems nowadays is that due to the lack of time, leaders do not pay enough attention to the individual, most of the time treating everyone equally. They ignore the different driving forces by each person and the inspiration of people in a given situation. Regular employee performance evaluation, management feedback, and common definition of the aspects of development are important tools. During the process of change, managers' communication always has to fit the organization and the given situation. It is important to note that effective information activities are essential at the beginning of the changes. Moreover, retrospective attitude facilitates the implementation of future changes, reduces employees' resistance and increases their trust.

The use of modern means of communication enables the highly motivated workforce to cooperate quickly and efficiently on a daily basis, develop ideas and suggestions and to engage additional employees in joint innovative work. The platform also provides the opportunity to develop a vision and strategic goals through a variety of tools, which can complement, but not replace the regular management information aimed at reducing employees' resistance and building the lacking trust.

In the present-day economic situation, the skills of employees are not always fully aligned with the knowledge necessary for changes, however, with conscious preparation and development, the risk can be managed well. The recognition of explicit and tacit knowledge, the support of its sharing, and the development of skills enable the rapid spread of organizational 'best practices', thereby contributing to the employees' ability to renewal that is the basis of successful change. The role of knowledge and research and development in innovation activities is increasingly emphasized alongside manufacturing. In order to facilitate development, it will be increasingly important to support the employees' hidden innovative abilities and motivate them. Those organizations that can take advantage of opportunities arising from innovation can increase their competitive advantage.

Positive managerial thinking and the awareness of incitement are key elements of leadership success. Thereunto, during the implementation of changes, there is a need for supportive, coachtype leaders, who support the empowerment of employees, as opposed to directive leaders.

It can be stated that most of the organizations already have a strategy, on the contrary, it can be mentioned as a negative that they do not always reach the employees as it would be sufficient, which is partly acknowledged by senior and mid-level managers. However, the research also revealed that the present-day employees have different attitudes towards change and the achievement of the goals of their organization, and therefore their motivation to study is different. The author believes that learning always improves efficiency and effectiveness, however, the research found that employees' purpose of studying besides work is not to support the achievement of organizational goals more quickly and promote organizational change more positively, but rather their individual goals. If employees are only partially aware of the organization's future plans, they will primarily realize their own plans. To change this, the primary responsibility of leaders is to make the changes transparent to the employees. In

addition, the knowledge necessary for leaders to meet their financial goals, also the knowledge of other disciplines - that are highly relevant to change management – are essential to the effective implementation of changes, as the aforementioned factors are in tight connection with each other and with change.

There are multifaceted possible suggestions for future research directions. On the one hand, it may be worth to carry out an analysis, like in the dissertation, by increasing the number of the elements of the research, to get closer to the representative sample. It would be advisable to extend the research to international level and to find out the opinions of the leaders of organizations in different Central European countries.

On the other hand, it would be worth extending the in-depth interviews and get an inside view to change management experts' opinions. In terms of future generations, it would be beneficial to place greater emphasis on teaching the fundamentals of change management beyond universities' faculties of economics and management, and in vocational secondary schools as well, thus enabling these institutions to prepare future employees to be more flexible in managing organizational situations.

### 7. Publications related to the topic of dissertation

### Peer-reviewed journal article

Szendi Nikoletta (2017): A gépjárműiparban dolgozók motivációinak, munkatapasztalatának és határidőtartási szokásainak összefüggései a termékfejlesztési projektekben METSZETEK-TÁRSADALOMTUDOMÁNYI FOLYÓIRAT 6:(4) pp. 37-53. (ISSN 2063-6415) DOI: 10.18392/metsz /2017/4/3

Szendi Nikoletta (2016): A multinacionális járműipari vállalatok innovációs stratégiája TAYLOR: GAZDÁLKODÁS- ÉS SZERVEZÉSTUDOMÁNYI FOLYÓIRAT: A VIRTUÁLIS INTÉZET KÖZÉP-EURÓPA KUTATÁSÁRA KÖZLEMÉNYEI 8:(1) pp.14-20. (ISSN 2064-4361)

Szendi Nikoletta (2015): Változtatások kommunikálása autóipari projektekben FLUENTUM: NEMZETKÖZI GAZDASÁG- ÉS TÁRSADALOMTUDOMÁNYI FOLYÓIRAT 2:(3) pp. 1-10. (ISSN 2064-6356)

Szendi Nikoletta, Székely Csaba (2015): Analysis of Knowledge Sharing Process in Automotive Industry Projects GAZDASÁG ÉS TÁRSADALOM 2015:(1-2) pp. 28-40. (ISSN 0865-7823) DOI: 10.21637/GT.2015.1-2.02

### Conference proceedings

Szendi Nikoletta (2018): A szervezeti innovációs készség vezetői elősegítése In: Resperger Richárd (szerk.): DEMOGRÁFIAI VÁLTOZÁSOK, VÁLTOZÓ GAZDASÁGI KIHÍVÁSOK: Nemzetközi tudományos konferencia. Konferencia helye és ideje: Sopron, Magyarország, 2018.11.08 Soproni Egyetem Kiadó, 2018. pp. 156-162. (ISBN:978-963-334-203-9)

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Szendi Nikoletta (2014): Tudás megőrzése és továbbadása az autóipari projektekben In: Székely Csaba (szerk.) MAKROGAZDASÁGI DÖNTÉSEK– HÁLÓZATI SZINERGIÁK: Nemzetközi tudományos konferencia a Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából, Tanulmánykötet. Konferencia helye, ideje: Sopron, Magyarország, 2014.11.12 (Nyugat-Magyarországi Egyetem) Sopron: Nyugat-magyarországi Egyetem (NYME), 2014. pp. 285-295. (ISBN:978-963-334-203-9)

Szendi Nikoletta (2013): Változtatásmenedzsment hatásai a járműiparban tevékenykedő vállalatok versenyképességére In: Székely Csaba (szerk.) FELELŐS TÁRSADALOM, FENNTARTHATÓ GAZDASÁG: Nemzetközi tudományos konferencia a Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából: Tanulmánykötet. 1157 p. Konferencia helye, ideje: Sopron, Magyarország, 2013.11.13 Sopron: Nyugat-magyarországi Egyetem Kiadó, 2013. pp. 549-560. (ISBN:978-963-334-144-5)