

Decreasing the Resistance of the Human Resources to Organizational Changes

Ovidiu NICOLESCU

The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, Romania

E-mail: inst.manager@gmail.com

Phone/Fax: +4 (0)213191967

Ciprian NICOLESCU

The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, Romania

E-mail: inst.manager@gmail.com

Phone/Fax: +4 (0)213191967

Abstract

One of the most difficult problems faced by the management of all organizations within innovation and change processes is the resistance to change. This study, dealing with this issue, has the following main objectives: to identify the main sources of resistance to change, to outline the directions for reducing change's resistance, to design essentially managerial approaches in order to counter the resistance to change.

The first part presents the 14 most frequent and most important sources of resistance to change, with a brief explanation of its content. It continues with the formulation of five key strands to reduce resistance to change. In the second part of the study, six major management approaches that can substantially reduce the resistance to change in organizations are established: shaping organizational culture, designing a strategy favouring organizational change, performing a management system "open" to change, achieving an intense and multilateral communication with all employees and key stakeholders, focusing on the coaching of staff towards change, developing consistent relationships with stakeholders, both internal and external.

The last part of the paper deals with the first managerial approach to counter managerial resistance to change, shaping organizational culture, in a contextual view.

Keywords: *management of change, innovation, change's resistance, human resources management, organizational culture*

JEL classification: O15, D23

The evolution of the past decades of human society, in general, and those of the organizations, in particular, demonstrates that such organizational changes are becoming more common, crucially affecting the functionality and performance of the organizations. Undoubtedly, the knowledge revolution [1] had and it still has a substantial impact, the transition to the new economy, which cannot be achieved without extensive changes, frequent and consistent in all parts of society and economy.

In this context, a key element is to overcome the resistance to change, which manifests itself in any organization on the level of individuals and organizational sub-units [2]. Without counteracting the resistance, the necessary organizational changes will not be fully performed and they will not generate the expected functionality and performance.

Given these factors, we developed this study, which has the following **main objectives**:

- to identify the main sources of resistance to change;
- to outline the directions to consider for reducing resistance to change;
- to point out the essentially managerial approaches to counter the resistance to change.

A. Main sources of resistance to change

Before proceeding to identify the sources of resistance to organizational change, it seems useful to present the view of Rick Maurer, the author of the book "Beyond the Wall of Resistance" [3]. According to him, **resistance is based on two sets of elements** that represent two distinct levels:

- first level, which has an informational-logical nature, obviously, people do not hide it; it is relatively more easily perceived and countered;
- second level, a personal and emotional level that often people do not flaunt, which has to be discovered, assessed and addressed with specific methods.

An analytical approach based on the study of many speciality papers and also based on our experience of management consultants has allowed us to identify the most frequent sources of resistance to change, which refers both to those directly involved in changing and to the context of change. In figure 1, we present the main sources of resistance to change.

Without posing great accent on the fact, it is necessary to explain briefly what each potential source of resistance to change constitutes:

- **Personal convenience** is a factor that is found in a certain proportion in every person. We manifest a certain tendency to save the forces we have, not always use them to make something new, contenting ourselves with what we have, with the current situation, even if it is not the best or favourable for us. The common expression for this is "we can go like this"
- **Individual habits**. Over time, each person has formed certain habits, results of their own personality and of the current situation. There is a tendency not to give up our habits and the organizational changes in which we are involved always affect some of our habits.
- **Fear of the unknown**. No matter how strong psychologically a person is, how much confidence has in herself/ himself and those around him/her, in change and its promoters, that person has always a feeling

of anxiety and fear. The stronger she/ he is, the more intense is the resistance to change.

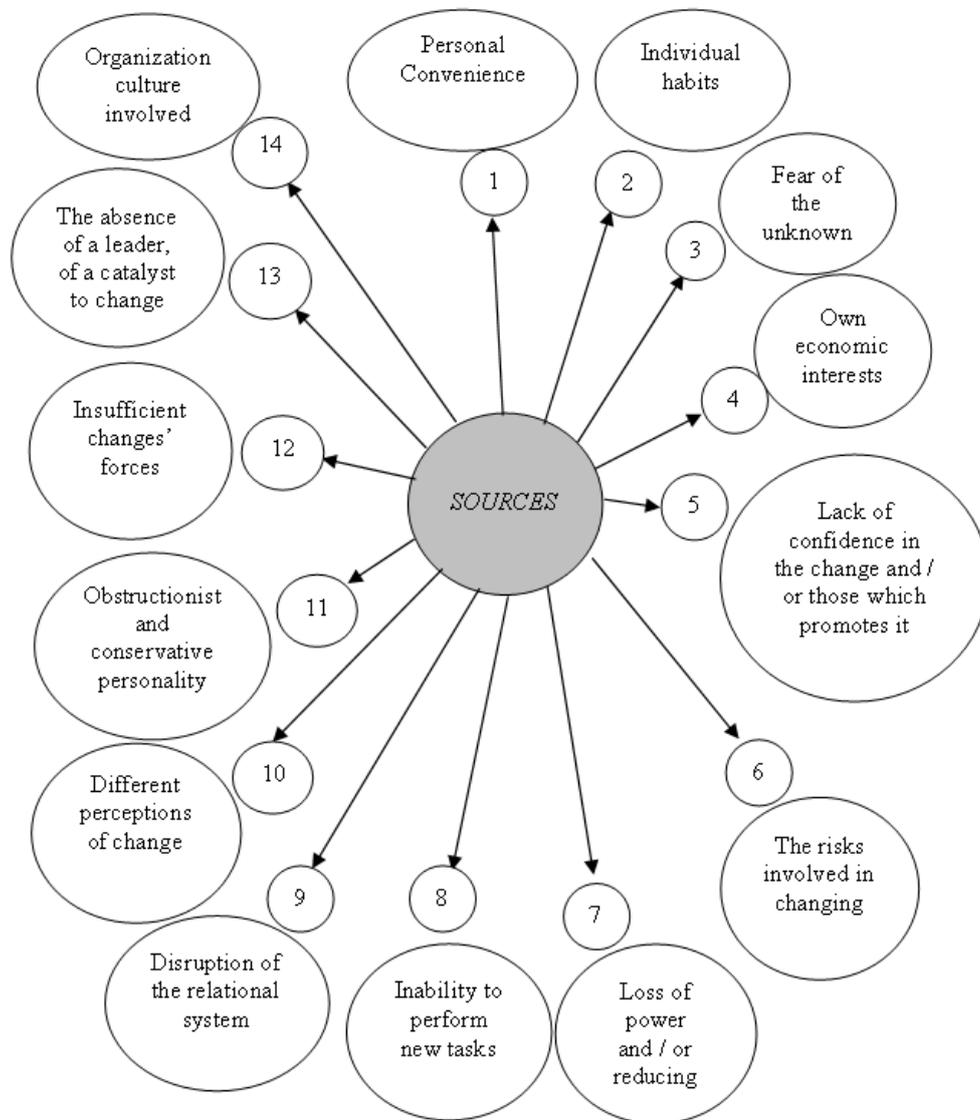


Figure 1 Major sources of personnel’s resistance to change

- **Its own economic interests.** Sometimes changes can result in a reduction, expected to meet our economic interests within the organization - salaries, bonuses, incentives, access to machinery spaces

etc. Such situations are strong incentives for the persons concerned to object or to "resist" to changes.

- **Lack of confidence in change and / or those who promote it.** Whenever a person involved in the change process does not trust those who promote or believe in its success, that person will manifest, either consciously or unconsciously, a certain resistance. Preparation for change and promoting it by prestigious people, who possess the ability to change, helps eliminate the inhibitor of change.
- **The risks involved in change.** When a person associates the proposed change to some personal risks (group or organizational risks), even if he trust its promoters and the final result, the person will show some restraint or opposition to actively engage in change.
- **Loss of power and / or reducing personal prestige.** Such a motivation to resist changing is manifested especially at managers and experts, people who consider that formal power, informal power and prestige are intrinsic parts of their work. Naturally, when they see that the envisaged change will diminish the power and prestige, they will be tempted to block those changes.
- **Inability to perform new tasks.** Organizational changes always cause changes in different proportions in how employees perform their tasks. In situations where employees do not possess the necessary knowledge to perform tasks it is very likely to seek to avoid changes or to reduce them as much as they can.
- **Disruption of the relational system of the person within the organization.** Each employee is integrated into a micro-office within the organization, being in certain work and personal relationships with others. When the employee is satisfied, the change will affect the relational context and its position therein, therefore he/she will tend not to get involved nor favour this change.
- **Different perceptions regarding change.** When the managers present the future changes which have to be achieved, they are not always perceived in the manner expected by them. The employees who develop different perceptions of the objectives, content, implications and effects regarding change, are likely not to generate the same motivation for change, sometimes even occur "no-change" motivations, which generate passivity or even active resistance to their implementation.
- **Conservative and obstructionist personality.** In any country, a small proportion of the population is natively characterized by tendency to avoid new, to block it because they rely too much on past and present. Ability to take risks, tolerance for inherent ambiguity regarding innovation and resistance to stress are reduced. Employees who fall into this category - and they are not few - will always tend to block these changes or at least not to get involved in performing them. A special

treatment must be applied for those, especially for strategic and very large changes.

- **Insufficient forces of change.** As it is known, in every organization there are forces caused by previous factors that resist changing. The counteraction at the organizational level is realized by generating and encouraging the forces that promote changes, which are superior. If this superiority is perceived by employees and other stakeholders, their resistance to change will be more intense.
- **The absence of a leader, an effective catalyst for change.** Multiple internal sources regarding the resistance to change, as mentioned before, can be removed and / or substantially reduced when a strong leader, influential promoter of renewals shows to the people the change's impact. Whenever there is not such a leader, the employees will show poor responsiveness, passivity and even resistance to the proposed changes. The leader is a decisive force for change's success.
- **Organization culture involved.** Although it is an external factor compared with the persons involved in changing, organizational culture strongly influences their attitude toward change. Companies that have focused their organizational culture on innovation, effort, team spirit, performance, will induce to the employees a positive attitude towards change, contributing significantly to reduce the explicit and implicit resistance to change.

Naturally, the factors presented are not exhaustive; they represent only a selection of the most intense and frequent factors which exist in companies, in general, including those in Romania.

B. Courses of Action in order to reduce resistance to change

In order to overcome the mentioned sources of resistance there are **five recommended main actions**, as shown in Fig. 2.

The first direction - **explanation and persuasion** - has logical information content, consisting in providing knowledge, information and arguments likely to develop the reasoning of the employees, and on this basis, favouring attitude to changing. This direction refers to the first level of resistance determined by Maurer and represents one of the classical approaches of change.

The involvement and participation of the employees target both sides: their information-logical side and their emotional side. The second one focused on building team spirit, tends to be prevalent and experiences a rapid boost in recent years, evidence of proliferation of management and of participatory approaches.

Providing **assistance** or informational, emotional, logistical **support** is a major course of action to reduce resistance to organizational change. As the resulted from the above, this course of action considers both layers which generate resistance to change. The usability and its effects become a growing practice. A major instrument and an expression of this trend is the proliferation of management

consultants and advisers, along with the professionalization of managers from the organizations.

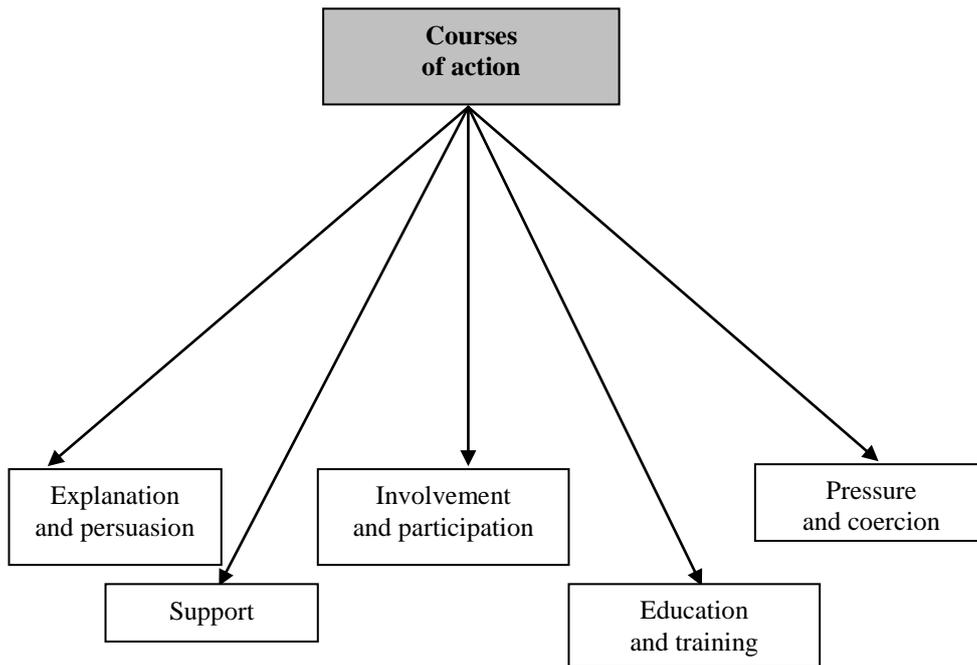


Figure 2 Lines of action to reduce resistance to change

The penultimate major direction of action, but not the least important one regards **education and training** of employees and other stakeholders. In the particular modern vision of Knowledge Management, this major direction becomes operational in a wide variety of training methods, training, mentoring, coaching etc., while addressing the intellect and the soul. By using this direction the scale of values and expectations, skills and attitudes necessary for the initiation, participation and conduct change are developed, which represents an effective antidote against resistance to change. Within learning organization, this type of approach records a maximum extent. In the context of transition to knowledge-based economy, training and learning organizations are proliferating rapidly.

The direction focused on putting pressure, even coercion on employees regards the emotional side of their personality. On the basis of reducing the resistance to change, this approach refers to the concept – only implicitly acknowledged by managers – that fears of punishment are the most important motivator of human behavior. This way of reducing resistance to change has a long time history, from primitive village, remaining predominantly absolutely up to the late nineteenth century. The knowledge-based management does not recommend

the usage of this way, only in exceptional cases and only for components of peripheral groups.

At the end of this paragraph, it seems necessary to emphasize the following:

- These five ways to reduce the resistance to change are not mutually exclusive! They can and should be combined in certain proportions, depending on the characteristics of the organization, expected changes and people involved.
- The increasingly powerful trend of the recent decades is to focus and combine 1 to 4 expected trends.
- Organization management has key role in countering human resistance to change through the decisions, actions and behaviors they design and perform effectively within the organization.

C. Managerial approaches to reduce resistance to change within the organization

Based on our own experience and on the study of specialty literature, we identified which are the main management approaches (see Fig. 3) that can substantially reduce personnel's resistance to change, without which no organization can perform the substantial changes required in order to ensure the functionality and competitiveness of the organizations. Furthermore it is necessary to point out briefly the contents of each approach (with one exception which refers to the process of reshape the organizational culture) which serves as a foundation for the other. There will be a special paragraph dedicated to this matter.

The main goals pursued by the organization, courses of action, resource allocation and timing of activities are determined by a long-term strategy. Consequently, designing a strategy [4] to decide the most feasible policy changes and effective organization is essential. Moreover, the strategy is about designing all the essential elements of the organization – dimensional, structural and functional, economic, technical, human and environmental – that a direct and indirect performing of the “de facto” policy changes which were taken under consideration.

These elements may facilitate the development of the component-level changes, organizational subdivision and the organization as a whole or vice versa. A major impact on this plan regards how to implement the strategy which has to be very well prepared, from all the above mentioned points of view, by establishing concrete measures to act in terms of responsibilities, resources, time and precise results. The strategy must be participatory, flexible and based on intensive communication sliding in order to favor the change.

The strategy becomes operational and the organization works with the decisive support of **its management system** [5]. The system and its five sub-assembly components – decision making, methodological and managerial, informational, organizational and human resource management – represent the mechanisms through which, in fact, the content and the performing of change

within the organization are established. Any change within organization has as its starting point – directly and indirectly – a decision taken by a manager, it involves certain methods and management techniques (diagnostic hearing, graphic work etc.), information and information flows, discharge of duties, competence and responsibilities of managers and performers. So, in any organization, the changes, whether individual or group runs with the contribution of the five managerial subsystems mentioned. In these circumstances it is particularly important that the management system as a whole and the five sub-components to be designed and performed in order to generate organizational change that the organization needs, with the expected positive effects.

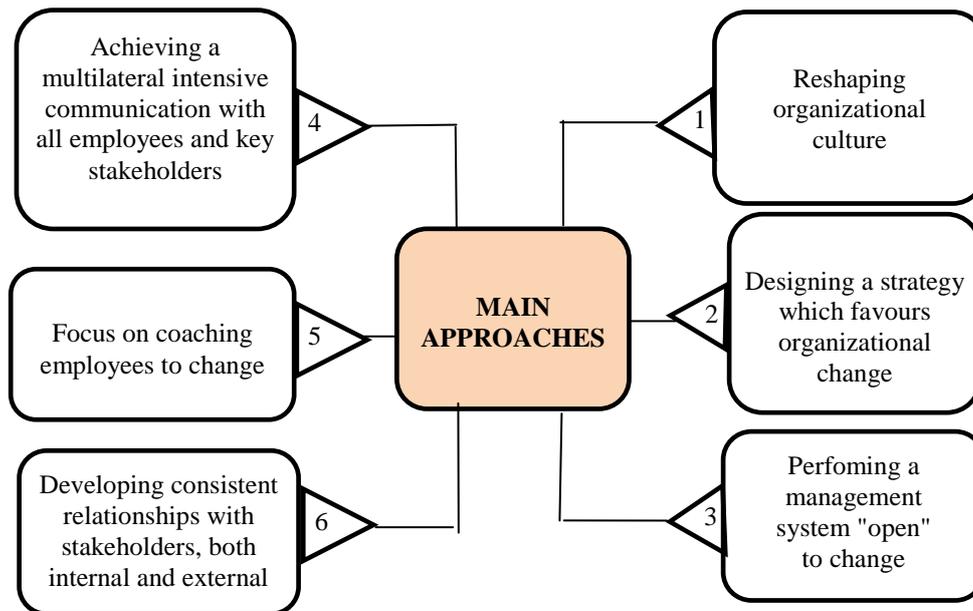


Figure 3 Major management approaches for reducing resistance to change

Any change is substantially based on communication, transmission and reception of messages, of information. Moreover, because each organizational change has to be triggered, to actually produce and generate the anticipated effects, there are necessary certain information, certain features of content, timing, transmission etc., in conclusion some communication processes. The practice within successful organizations around the world demonstrates that individual and organizational changes within the organization are easier and produce better results when they are preceded and accompanied by processes of communication, capable of providing timely and accurate information for all persons involved and stakeholders. Communication prepares people and groups of people for change,

and during change's deployment provides information that facilitates achieving the necessary corrections and refinements.

Training represents the engine of any individual and group decision, actions and behavior. Naturally, this managerial axiom is viable when we refer to organizational changes. In order to persuade people to get involved in the process of change and in order to determine change to produce the expected results, all employees as well as stakeholders must be motivated. Specifically, incentives (material, non-material, moral, organizational, individual incentives) have to be established and implemented in order to positively motivate the persons involved so that change can be realized. Simultaneously, it is absolutely necessary to provide similar incentives and apply penalties if it is found that some individuals and groups of people do not normally respond to incentives regarding the process of change. Their application should be called only after it is found that contextual incentives do not ensure the proposed change and / or have the expected positive effects. The elements of negative motivation in the processes of change must be minimized to the maximum, but they must be taken into consideration, because there are people and groups of people who can be determined to act in a certain way only by using them. In order to have maximum positive effect, motivations, both positive and negative, must be designed and applied to the intensity of present sources of resistance to change in individuals and groups involved in change.

The last main managerial approach to defeat the resistance to change refers directly to the stakeholders of change. In every organizational change occurs, regardless of our will or desire, one or more stakeholders. The more important and broader the organizational change is, the greater the number of stakeholders involved and their influence. If we speak of a simple change at the level of executive, the stakeholders are the manager and some of the colleagues of the person, but, if we take into consideration major changes, which refer to markets, financial resources, products, technologies etc., the number of stakeholders is greater. The stakeholders can represent small or large groups of employees, clients, banks, local administration, suppliers etc. In order to determine change, it is necessary to identify first the main stakeholders, within and outside the organization, which can influence change and establish the ways to promote change or at least not to resist changing. The processes involved are neither easy nor simple, but if the organization is equipped with a professional management system, their development is greatly facilitated.

D. Reshaping organizational culture

Studies made by many specialists as well as our own analysis and observations, as managers, consultants and scientific researchers have demonstrated an intense and compliant relationship between organizational culture and organizational change.

A specific approach was developed, focused on the process of adequacy of the organizational culture to the changes. The approach is called **organizational transformation**. In essence, organizational transformation lies in a holistic

approach, focusing on the human dimension of the organization, which simultaneously takes into account changes in overall goals, structures, culture and strategy of the organization, which is based on new perceptions, ways of thinking and types of behavior [6]. Organizational transformation involves changes at **three levels**. At the first level is the change of attitudes and behaviors of the organization's employees. The second level of change refers to the management system as a whole, while the latter one aims at the deeper layers of the organizations, the systems of values, beliefs, community affectivity of employees. Note that the last level or degree of change constitutes the basis for the first two, hence the primacy of organizational culture change throughout the company.

Another feature of the organizational transformation is that the changes are not confined to the maintenance of the functioning of the organization, but they aim at renewing the organization as a whole. In order to understand better and more comprehensively, we call on **Nadler's matrix of organizational changes** (see fig.4). **At the basis of the matrix, there are the following elements:**

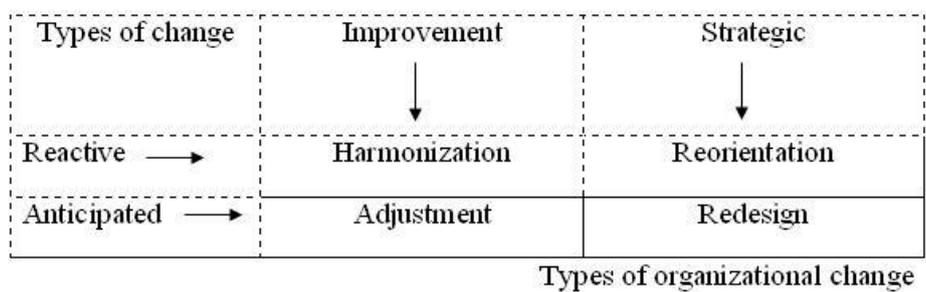


Figure 4 Nadler's matrix of organizational changes

a) From the content's point of view, the organizational changes can be: improvement changes and strategic changes. Improvement changes refer to amelioration of the organization's functionality within the conception and the existent strategic coordinates. Strategic changes refer to, as it can be assumed, the basic elements of the company and/or of the system or decision.

b) If we speak in terms of timing, the organizational changes can be: reactive, when they offer solutions to external events; anticipated when the changes are planned in accordance to the expected evolutions of the environment and business.

From the intersection of these coordinates results four types of changes within the organizational culture and system:

- harmonization, which deals with improvements which take into account anticipated future events;
- adjustment, which refers to improvements realized as an answer when certain unanticipated external events occur;
- reorientation, which have a strategic nature and are realized in case certain major and anticipated events occur;

- redesigning the organization or certain components of the organization, generated when some events occur and threaten its existence. In this situation, radical changes within the organization are necessary, which aim at the organizational culture, managerial strategy, managerial system and others.

Organizational transformation represents deep changes which consider organizational harmonization, adaptation and reorientation. Frequently, the organizational transformation implies redesigning the organization as a whole.

An efficient organizational transformation is conditioned, based on the opinion of several specialists, by the existence of a **pre-conditions set**:

- the organizational management must be dedicated to changes;
- each employee has to be capable to know how a good organization should be and what values must consider;
- external condition must exist within the organization environment so that the problems cannot be solved or addressed by using the previous methods;
- key persons from the organization must support the organizational changes;
- managers and specialists who are in charge with the process of change must be prepared to face a long term process;
- the persons who implement the change have to know that in the beginning they will face a certain resistance to change;
- there must be willingness to learn from a large number of people during the implementation of changes;
- the majority of the personnel must be convinced of the necessity to perform the anticipated changes;
- the organization must be ready to call on any assistance or/and available and useful contribution within and outside the organization;
- providing access to information involved in all the phases of the organizational change;

We recommend taking into consideration **the coordinates** presented in Fig.5 in order to generate organizational changes.

The elements presented in this study – without being exhaustive – can substantially contribute to the decrease of the resistance to change. Knowing them and taking them into consideration is necessary for all the persons who are significantly involved in organizational changes.

The present times, characterized by profound and dynamic changes [7], determine most of the population to get involved, regardless of their desire, in major changes, whose implementation and completion depends on overcoming the resistance to change in each of us and ours together, at micro and macro levels.

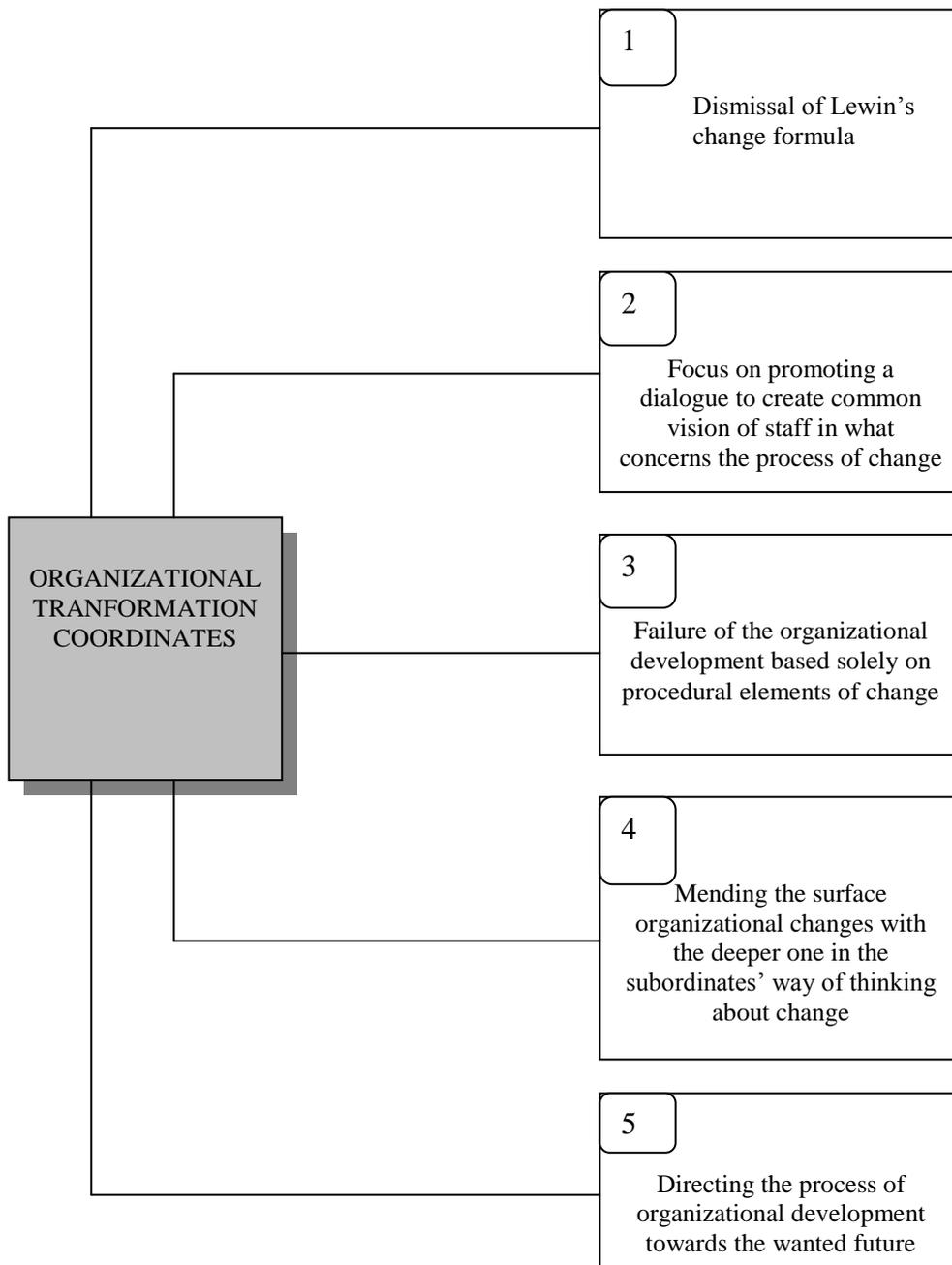


Figure 5 Organizational transformation coordinates

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