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VIEW OF MANAGING CHANGES AND STRESS IN CROATIAN ENTERPRISES

Abstract

Every organization faces organizational changes during its existence. Changes in customer needs, emergence of new competitors, new technologies, availability of limited resources, economic and social trends are just some of the reasons why organizations have to adapt their strategies, structure, culture, technology and people (their skills, knowledge, habits…). Human resources are most valuable asset and therefore require to be carefully managed through the process of change implementation. This is a prerequisite for an organization to be successful in the contemporary environment. Changes generate stress for all members of the organization which in return affects the quality of work, behaviour and engagement. The purpose of this paper is to examine characteristics of managing changes and stress in Croatian enterprises from the perspective of the employees and managers. The results of the study conducted on a sample of 102 respondents show that organizations mostly operate in dynamic environment which reflects the necessity for continuous implementations of changes whether they are adaptive or innovative. More than 60% of the respondents perceive change as a positive process even though almost half of them regard resistance to change in their organizations to be moderate. Results from the simple linear regression also confirmed that change and stress management strategies have an effect on the level of resistance to change.

Keywords: change management, stress, resistance to change

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizational changes are an important prerequisite for successful business in a new competitive landscape. Some argue that organization's competitive advantage no longer resides primarily on its physical resources or financial strength but rather on its capacity to embrace change and innovate (Peus, Frey, Gerkhardt, Fischer & Traut-Mattausch, 2009). Changes are considered an integral part of organizational life cycle. On the positive side, change can create opportunities for

development, growth and learning. On the negative side, it can produce problems, affect employees' behaving, and cause stress amog employees (Veloso-Besio, Cuadra-Peralta, Gil-Rodríguez, Ponce-Correa & Sjöberg-Tapia, 2019, p. 252; (Mukerjee, Montani & Vandenberghe, 2021, p. 1144). People usually react with resistance to change, which disturbs organizational climate and can decrease employee's motivation.

Organizational survival and success require that the organization recognizes the need for different types of change and ensures their effective managing. Any organizational change, regardless of reason implies individual change i.e., the implementation of change at the organizational level demands a change in employees, their behavior, attitude, values and way of thinking. As the key and most important resource of any organization, people must be cornerstone of change management process. Their perception of the expected change and deployed change management strategies will determine the success of the change. On that note Piderit (2000, p. 783) asserts that "successful organizational adaptation is increasingly reliant on generating employee support and enthusiasm for proposed changes, rather than merely overcoming resistance".

Despite extensive studies investigating change and stress management, there is a scarce amount of research that focuses on Croatian enterprises and studies the features of the change concept in their context. Previous research mostly contends the need for recognition and implementation of modern insights in change management (Alfirević, 2000; Alfirević & Pavičić, 2004; Tomljenović & Dujanić, 2009; Dukić, Dukić & Bertović, 2016). Although Aleksić (2009) concludes that the characteristics of successful change management are present in most long-lasting Croatian companies, employees show less initiative to be involved in the change process and there is a lack of change management teams.

Considering the importance of the effect the change has on the organization this paper aims to describe distinctive types of change, reasons for change and change and stress management that can be found in Croatian enterprises. The first objective was to determine the perception on change among respondents with different demographic characteristics. Secondly, we wanted to investigate what types of changes are mostly present in these enterprises. The third objective was to test whether the list of theoretical sources of resistance to change and modes of reducing change were observable in our empirical research. Finally, we wanted to determine if the applied approach to change and stress management in Croatian enterprises affected resistance to change.

In relation to the studied theory, the hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Employee perception of change differs depending on their demographic characteristics.

H2: The prevailing type and reasons for organizational change differ depending on the size of the organization.

H3: There is a difference in the perception of non-managerial and managerial staff towards resistance to organizational changes.

H4: Change and stress management mode affects resistance to organizational changes.

The paper is organized as follows. First, we will give a theoretical overview of change, change management and stress as a consequence of changes. Next, we will present and discuss the results of the study. We conclude by presenting the main results, stating the limitations of the study, and identifying several areas that need further research.

2. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

2.1. Organizational change characteristics

In today's business world, change has become part of the normal business routine and has a direct impact on business performance. The goal of modern businesses is to implement constructive change while minimizing the negative impact on employees.

Semantically, change can be defined simply as a transition from one state to another. Organizational change can be defined as a new way of organizing and working in a company (Dawson, 2003, p. 11; cited in Hughes, 2010, p. 2). It can refer to changes in organizational structure, goals, strategy, technological processes, organizational culture, information system, market performance, etc., and can be caused by internal or external organizational factors. There are many ways to categorize organizational change, depending on the context in which the need for change arises, what elements it encompasses, and what its goal is. Although each categorization uses its own specific nomenclature, some differently named types of change share almost identical characteristics (Tomljenović, 2016). Some authors distinguish between adaptive, innovative, and radical innovative changes (Damanpour & Gopalakrishnan, 1999). According to others (Kleiner & Corrigan, 1989; Ikonne, 2021), changes can be developmental, transitional, and transformational. The classification into planned and unplanned (Van Woerkum, Aarts & Van Herzele, 2011), episodic and continuous (Weick & Quinn, 1999), reactive and proactive changes is frequently mentioned (Pierce, Gardner & Dunham, 2002). In addition to the types of change, approaches to change management in research also differ in terms of the organizational level to which they refer.

Al-Haddad and Kotnour (2015, p. 241) have classified the literature in the field of organizational change into four key areas. The first element of the taxonomy is the type of change, which can be defined as characteristics that describe the form of the change and are divided into two categories: scale of change and duration of change. The second element refer to the enablers of change, which can be defined as the factors that increase the probability of the change's success. The third element is the change methods, which can be defined as the actions taken to manage the change and are divided into two categories: systematic change methods and change management methods. The fourth element is the results of the change, i.e., the outcomes or consequences of the change for the organization. Based on the literature review, they concluded that the probability of success varies from one organization to another because organizations undergoing change differ greatly in terms of their structure, systems, strategies and human resources, and the right choice of implementation method corresponds to the type or area of organizational change.

Change management is more often studied from a macro or organizational perspective, but how individuals embrace and cope with change and the stress it brings is very important. Jack Walker, Armenakis and Bernerth (2007) examined the integral effect of the content, context, and process of change, as well as individual attitudes, on the success of organizational change. According to the aforementioned authors, every organization consists of a number of different individuals with their personalities that influence the attitudes and behaviors of the organization. Individual differences can greatly influence success and commitment to change (Jack Walker et al., 2007, p. 764).

2.2. Internal context of change – individual factors

Different approaches and research foci are used in the study of change management at the individual and micro levels. Some authors are more concerned with psychological factors related to individual employees' reactions to organizational change (e.g., Straatman, Kohnke, Hattrup & Mueller, 2016; Fløvik, Knardahl & Christensen, 2019; Judge, Thoresen, Pucik & Welbourne, 1999). Resistance to change is most frequently cited, but it is by no means the only aspect in this strand of research. There is also a large body of research on the influence of organizational culture and its dynamics on the success of change implementation (e.g., Jones, Jimmieson & Griffiths, 2005; Abdul Rashid, Sambasivan & Abdul Rahman, 2004). In their research, Olafsen, Nilsen, Smedsrud and Kamaric (2021) confirmed that the strength of organizational culture is critical to commitment to change. A flexible or dynamic organizational culture showed a more significant relationship with positive commitment to change or affective commitment to change - the gold standard for commitment to change. The authors point out that today's economic context requires the development of a culture suitable for change. The cognitive approach to change specifically

examines the stress it causes and the different ways employees cope with it (e.g., Rafferty & Griffin, 2006; Nobre, Tobias & Walker, 2009; Contreras & Gonzalez, 2021).

The following is a brief overview of selected research on resistance and stress caused by organizational change. According to Dahl (2011), most organizations are based on internal trust and reliability, with most employers counting on employees' loyal and dedicated service to the organization. Organizational change – changes in strategies or goals – can threaten these values. For example, a change in an organization's end goal may alter the internal allocation of resources among departments, require new skills, or necessitate a major restructuring of the workforce. His research has empirically shown that organizations are at significant risk for increasing stress when they decide to make changes in several different areas simultaneously. This type of psychological impact is problematic for organizations as employee productivity decreases due to stress. This research was conducted under very positive external economic conditions in Denmark, suggesting that internal change management processes are critical to employee attitudes toward organizational change. According to Smollan (2015), research shows that organizational change is often associated with stress. This is partly due to the expected or actual negative consequences of the changes (e.g., job loss, loss of autonomy, etc.) and partly due to the transition process, which can cause additional work and lead to significant uncertainty and anxiety. Fløvik et al. (2019) found in their study that multiple or recurrent organizational changes have a significant impact on work environment factors such as role conflict, social support, job insecurity, job demands, trust in management, but also on various somatic and mental health complaints of employees. Tavakoli (2010) developed a model of organizational change that views stress as a mediator between organizational change and resistance to change. The model introduces strategies for reducing negative stress and resistance, and for increasing positive stress and positive health outcomes among employees adapting to change. It is obvious, resistance to change and stress can be linked in different ways. The implementation of change causes employees stress due to the uncertainty of the changes introduced, but the stressful work environment also negatively affects commitment and readiness for organizational change (Vakola & Nikolau, 2005). In general, it should not be assumed that change is always stressful because nowadays workers are frequently confronted with change and have become accustomed to it, but also because some changes are stressful while others reduce stress or have very little impact on it. Stress can play an adaptive and motivational role and reduce resistance if the organization takes positive actions, e.g., participation, support, training, communication etc. (Tavakoli, 2010)

Research has shown that participation in the decision-making process (Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois & Callan, 2004; Egan, Bambra, Thomas, Petticrew, Whitehead & Thomson, 2007; Boohene & Williams, 2012), adherence to pre-existing guidelines and planned change (Korsgaard, Sapienza & Schweiger, 2002; Doeze Jager, Born, & van der Molen, 2022), and provision of adequate and effective information and communication flow (Allen, Jimmieson, Bordia, & Irmer, 2007; Husain, 2013) have a positive impact on the quality of organizational change implementation and ensure a healthy work environment. According to Bouckenooghe, Devos & Van Den Broeck (2009, p. 562) readiness for change is a multifaceted attitude toward change, comprising emotional, cognitive, and intentional readinesses for change. Tavakoli (2010) emphasizes the importance of developing positive employee attitudes toward organizational change, for which managers are primarily responsible. According to the author, positive organizational change, i.e., a positive employee response to change, is directly related to the creativity, enthusiasm, improvisation, exploration, and entrepreneurship of managers. Schulz-Knappe, Koch and Beckert (2019) emphasize the particular importance of the quality of change communication as a key predictor of individual support for change.

Based on previous research, it can be concluded that the negative impact of change on employees can be reduced by establishing procedures, planning for change, involving employees in decision making on various aspects of change, active leadership, quality communication, etc.

In the continuation of this paper, the results of empirical research on employees' attitudes towards organizational change in the Republic of Croatia are presented, focusing on resistance to change and stress caused by change.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

3.1. Research methodology

Considering the theoretical background of change management study was conducted among employees in Croatian enterprises. The research was performed using an online questionnaire during May and June 2021. Purposive sampling was used in this research because we wanted to provide more detailed description on change and stress management in Croatian enterprises. It is a useful method in these situations (Tkalac Verčić, Sinčić Ćorić, Pološki Vokić, 2010). At the begging of the questionnaire was stated that the targeted respondents are employees or unemployed persons who work or worked in an organization that has undergone changes. The questionnaire was distributed using personal contacts and social networks. The first part entailed questions pertaining to sociodemographic variables, followed by questions which relate to changes, change management and stress management. The final part contained questions about the enterprise of the respondent.

Various theoretical concepts and research were used to design the research instrument (Table 1). The first 4 items relate to types of change, readiness for change, and environmental dynamics. Resistance to change has 3 items, change management has 4 items, and stress management has 2 items. The statements were rated on a Likert scale of 5 grades, with 1 representing the lowest rating (total disagreement with the statement), and 5 was the highest rating (total agreement with the statement).

Table 1 Research instrument

Variables codes	Source	Variable description
C1	Oreg (2006); Piderit (2000)	Emotional readiness for change
C2	Damanpour & Gopalakrishnan (1999)	Type of changes
C3	Nelson (2003)	Dynamism of external environment
C4	Armenakis & Bedeian (1999)	Reasons for change
R1-R3	Pardo del Val & Martinez Fuentes (2003); Oreg (2003)	Resistance to change (size, modes of resistance, modes of reducing resistance)
CM1	Nelson (2003)	Organizational adaptability
CM2	Miller, Johnson & Grau (1994)	Quality of change communication
CM3	Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch & Rhoades (2001)	Support by supervisors
CM4	Lines (2004); Oreg (2006); Piderit (2000)	Process participation / Intentional readiness for change
SM1	Smollan (2015)	Individual stress perception
SM2	Smollan (2015); Yu (2009)	Stress management

Source: adapted from Bouckenooghe, Devos & Van Den Broeck (2009)

3.2. Research results

The questionnaire was completed by 102 respondents. The proportion of male was 45% and female 55% (Table 2). Most of the respondents (39.2%) were from 26 to 35 years old, and more than half (51 %) have been employed in an organization for 3 or less years. Approximately 43% of the respondents acquired master's degree. Amongst the respondents, 76.5% have a non-managerial position and 23.5% have managerial position. Respondents mostly work in medium-sized enterprises (41; 40.2%), followed by small (29; 28.4%) and large (24; 23.5%) and micro-organizations (8; 7.8%).

Table 2 Characteristics of the respondents

Variable	Categories	N=102	%
Gender	Male	46	45
	Female	56	55
Age	18 - 25	35	34.3
	26 - 35	40	39.2
	36 - 45	16	15.7
	46 - 55	9	8.8
	55+	2	2
Education degree	High school degree	31	30.4
	Bachelor's degree	27	26.5
	Master's degree	44	43.1
Length of time working in an organization (in years)	Up to 3	52	51
	4 – 8	27	26.5
	9 – 15	14	13.7
	16 – 24	8	7.8
	Above 25	1	1
Job position	Non-managerial staff	78	76.5
	Managerial staff	24	23.5

Source: Research

The external environment acts as the strongest driver for organizational changes (Nelson, 2003; Aleksić, 2014, 23; Belak & Ušljebrka, 2014). The environment is usually described as dynamic and turbulent for most of the organizations. This is ascertained by this study since most of the respondent (77.5%) have confirmed that "the environment in which my organization operates is predominantly dynamic and sometimes even turbulent", while 22.5% of the respondents disagree with the statement.

The main goal of the study was to investigate the types of changes that enterprises encounter, the mode they deploy in managing changes, and the stress employees experience. In the continuation of the paper hypothesis and research findings are presented.

H1: Employee perception of change differs depending on their demographic characteristics.

The way the respondents perceive change was measured by the statement "I perceive change as a positive process" using a 5-point Likert scale was (1 = "strongly disagree" – 5 = "strongly agree"). The t-test was conducted to determine if there is any difference in perceiving "change as a positive process" from the perspective of female and male respondents. There was no significant effect for gender, $t(100) = -0.27$, $p = 0.139$, despite female respondents ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.86$) showed higher scores than male ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.94$). The results reflect the awareness of employees that changes are constant in today's environment and urge an organization and its employees forward.

Although, on average employees without managerial responsibilities "perceive change more positive" ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.90$) than employees with managerial responsibilities ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.90$) results ($t(100) = 0.24$, $p = 0.254$) did not show any statistically significant difference. Having authority in an organization reflects greater responsibility so managers are more conscious of the risks involved in making changes.

Furthermore, one-way ANOVA ($F(4, 97) = 0.19$, $p > 0.05$) showed that "perception of change as a positive process" does not differ significantly across different age groups. Also, the results ($F(4, 97) = 0.80$, $p > 0.05$) showed that "perception of change" does not differ significantly across different length of time working in an organization.

Finally, one-way ANOVA ($F(2, 99) = 7.91$, $p < 0.001$) revealed that education degree had a significant impact on respondent's "perception of change as a positive process". Education degree

can explain 14% of the variability of the "perception of change". After the *post-hoc* test (Tukey's test) we have determined statistically significant difference between respondents with the high school (*M* = 3.58) and bachelor's degree (*M* = 4.11) and between respondents with the high school and master's degree (*M* = 4.36). Respondents with the bachelor's and master's degree did not show statistically significant difference in perceptions of change. Respondents with master's degree on average perceive change most positively. In conclusion, respondents with higher level of education evaluate change more positively than respondents with high school degree.

In conclusion, *H1* is partly supported because the only difference in perception of change was found among respondents with different level of education.

H2: The prevailing type and reasons for organizational change differ depending on the size of the organization.

In view of different types of changes stated in literature, classification of changes based on mode and complexity of their implementation was selected for this study. Respondents were asked to select type of changes they have faced in their organizations (Figure 1). Multiple choices were possible.
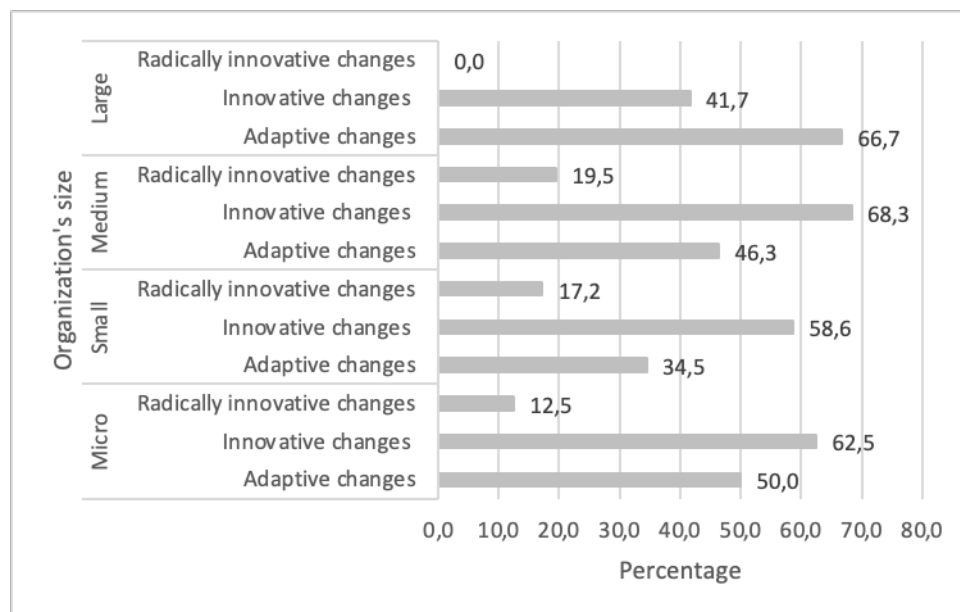

Figure 1 Types of changes in different size of organizations

Source: Research

In general, the respondents reported experiencing mostly innovative changes (58.8%) and adaptive changes (48%) within their organizations. Innovative changes are moderate in complexity, costs and resistance (Sikavica & Novak, 1999, p. 561). Radically innovative changes are the rarest (13.7%) as expected because they are complex and expensive when being implemented. These changes are present in environment of great uncertainty and great resistance to change. Large organizations implement mostly adaptive changes (66.7%). Because of their size they demonstrate slow pace in adaption to the environment. Moreover, respondents working in large organization did not recognize any radically innovative changes. Radically innovative changes are mostly (17.2%) present in medium-sized organizations. Micro-, small-, and medium-sized organizations have a similar ratio of change types. The most common change type for all three sizes of organizations is innovative (62.5%, 58.6%, and 68.3%, respectively). The next most common change type is adaptive (50%, 34.5%, and 46.3%, respectively), followed by radically innovative changes (12.5%, 17.2%, and 19.5%, respectively).

Table 3 Reasons for change in different size of organizations

Reasons for change	Micro (%) (N = 8)	Small (%) (N = 29)	Medium (%) (N = 41)	Large (%) (N = 24)	Total (%) (N = 102)
Market dynamism	37.5	20.7	12.2	8.3	15.7
Socio-economic trends	12.5	13.8	29.3	8.3	18.6
New technologies	25	6.9	19.5	20.8	16.7
Organizational crises and problems	12.5	20.7	7.3	20.8	14.7
Strategy change	0	6.9	14.6	8.3	9.8
People change	12.5	31.0	12.2	33.3	22.5
Other	0	0.0	4.9	0.0	2

Source: Research

Respondents were asked to select the most common reason for change in their organizations. As shown in Table 3 most respondents decided for 'people change' (22.5%). People change reflect changes in values, skills and attitude of each employee. Among the listed reasons for change in the questionnaire, the smallest number of respondents (9.8%) identified "strategy change" as the most common reason, excluding those who selected "other" reasons. Strategies represent long-term plans and change of strategy occurs less frequently than do technical changes (Daft, 2010). This incentive for change was not recognized by any of 8 respondents from micro-organizations. In a category "other" two respondents added new reasons: "new owner" and "change of work program". "Market dynamism" was most prominent reason for change for respondents from micro-organizations (37.5%) while the same was least common reason in large organizations (8.3%). In large and small organizations "people change" was chiefly selected as a reason for a change.

These findings partly support *H2*. We found a difference in the prevailing type of changes between large organizations and other sizes of organizations, while micro, small, and medium organizations mostly implemented the same type of changes, namely innovative changes. Considering reasons for change respondents from small and large organizations consider "people change" to be most common. Respondents from micro and medium organizations selected "market dynamism" and "socio-economic trends" respectively.

H3: There is a difference in the perception of non-managerial and managerial staff towards resistance to organizational changes.

Resistance to organizational change in an organization was evaluated on scale from 1 (very small) to 5 (very large). None from the respondents described resistance to change as very large. Most of the respondents consider resistance to change to be moderate (46.1%), then small (25.5%), very small (14.7%) and large (13.7%).

Table 4 Reasons for resistance to change (non-managerial and managerial staff)

Reasons for resistance to change	Non-managerial staff (%)	Managerial staff (%)	Total
Fear of the new	59.0	41.7	54.9
Misunderstanding and lack of trust between employees and managers	28.2	62.5	36.3
Economic loss	48.7	37.5	46.1
Possible social losses	24.4	20.8	23.5
Unacceptance of control loss	23.1	12.5	20.6

Source: Research

There are many sources of resistance to change (Sikavica & Novak, 1999; Pardo del Val & Martínez Fuentes, 2003). The results presented in Table 4 showed that, in general, "fear of the new" is most common reason (54.9%), and the same applies to employees without managerial

responsibilities (59%). Fear of the unknown is intertwined with all other reasons, especially because non-managerial staff usually has less information about the changes being implemented in an organization. Ordinarily, employees with managerial responsibilities have better insight into change implementation, experience less fear but are more aware of the "misunderstanding and lack of trust between employees and managers" since they have designated it as the most common reason for resistance to change (62.5%). With the presence of fear of the new and lack or poor clarification of changes, resistance to change can be expected in any organization. It is imperative for an organization managing changes to gain the trust of its employees by providing all the necessary information about the change and to readily and regularly communicate with employees to minimize their fears (Penava & Šehić, 2014).

In the continuance of the questionnaire respondents were asked to select modes of resistance to change (Table 5). Multiple choices could have been made.

Table 5 Modes of resistance to change (non-managerial and managerial staff)

Modes of resistance to change	Non-managerial staff (%)	Managerial staff (%)	Total (%)
Avoiding tasks	47.4	58.5	50.0
Insufficient productivity	64.1	54.2	61.8
Absenteeism	20.5	20.8	20.6
Sabotage	7,7	16.7	9.8
Resignations	7,7	4.2	6.9
None of the above	7,7	8.3	7.8

Source: Research

"Insufficient productivity" proved to be most usual manifestation of resistance to change for non-managerial staff (64.1%) and "avoiding tasks" for managerial staff (58.5%). Employees who are unsatisfied with the change lose their motivation what is then visible in their productivity or avoidance in performing tasks, especially those required by the change (Belak & Ušljebrka, 2014). Based on the previous results indicating mostly moderate resistance to change, "sabotage" and "resignations" were the least commonly reported forms of resistance for both non-managerial staff (7.7% for both) and managerial staff (16.7% and 4.2%, respectively). Although in total 8 (8.3%) respondents did not recognize any of the stated modes of resistance to change in their organization, nobody offered any other answer. A possible explanation for this could be found in the fact that 40.2% of respondents described resistance to change as small or very small. In such situations, it is less likely for employees to demonstrate significant resistance to change. Furthermore, the changes are mostly described as innovative, and they are characterized by a moderate level of resistance to change.

The study also included investigation of modes of reducing resistance to change (Table 6).

Table 6 Modes of reducing resistance to change (non-managerial and managerial staff)

Modes of reducing resistance to change	Non-managerial staff (%)	Managerial staff (%)	Total (%)
Informing employees about changes and their implementation	26.9	29.2	27.5
Enabling employees' participation in the process of change preparations	26.9	25.0	26.5
Building trust in management	19.2	8.3	16.7
Constant counseling and education of employees	26.9	37.5	29.4

Source: Research

According to the results presented earlier with "fear of the new" being the main reason for resistance to change (54.9%), all modes of reducing resistance to change including counseling (29.4%) and informing employees (27.5%) and enabling their participation (26.5%) have been

similarly identified by all respondents. "Building trust in management" was selected only by two respondents with managerial responsibilities.

We can conclude that the results show support for *H3*. From the perspective of reason for resistance to change non-managerial employees selected "fear of the new" while employees with managerial responsibilities decided for "misunderstanding and lack of trust between employees and managers". Non-managerial employees consider "insufficient productivity" as most common mode of resistance to change. Managerial staff opted for "avoiding tasks". "Constant counseling and education of employees" was mostly suggested mode of reducing resistance to change for managers and "informing employees about changes" and "enabling employees' participation" for non-managerial staff.

H4: Change and stress management mode affects resistance to organizational changes.

The approach organizations use in managing changes and stress was researched using six statements formulated from the literature (Table 7). A 5-point Likert scale was used to answer the items (1 = "strongly disagree" – 5 = "strongly agree").

Table 7 Descriptive analysis: managing change and stress

Variables codes	Variables (statements)	M	SD	Mode	Skew	Kurtosis
CM1	My organization adapts easily and promptly to market changes.	3.64	1.01	4	– 0.32	– 0.52
CM2	I was informed about my new roles and superior's expectations during organizational change implementation.	3.72	1.01	4	– 0.46	– 0.38
CM3	Superior manager communicated with the employees to gain their commitment during the organizational change.	3.61	0.99	4	– 0.40	– 0.12
CM4	Employees in my organization show initiative for inclusion in a change process.	3.61	1.14	4	– 0.53	– 0.36
SM1	I was under stress caused by the changes being introduced in the organization.	3.23	1.08	3	– 0.03	– 0.66
SM2	Manager manages stress in an effective way, understands how stress affects work results and recognizes unhealthy stress in the organization.	3.33	1.01	3	– 0.12	– 0.55

Source: Research

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the entire scale was 0.74 representing acceptable reliability.

Respondents evaluated statement referring to employee informing about new roles and superior's expectations with the highest average rating ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.01$). This implies the employees' need for acquiring more information about organizational changes and more communication with the superiors. Based on the presented results respondents experienced moderate stress caused by the changes introduced in the organization ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.08$). This was probably not due to effectiveness of manager's stress management ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.01$) but because introduced changes were mostly innovative (58.8%) and adaptive (48%) rather than radical.

Since resistance to change will define success or failure of the implemented change it is vital for management of organization to develop appropriate change management strategy. Simple linear regression was used to determine the effect change and stress management has on different levels of resistance to change (Tables 8, 9 and 10). Variable *change and stress management* was represented by first four statements (CM1 – CM4) and sixth statement (SM2) listed in Table 7 and dependent *variable resistance to change* was measured by respondents on scale from 1 (very small) to 5 (very large).

Table 8 Model summary of simple linear regression (change and stress management to predict resistance to change)

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.366[a]	0.134	0.125	0.846

a. Predictor (Constant): Change and stress management[1]
b. Dependent Variable: Resistance to change

[1]*Composite variable consisting of items 1 to 4 referring to change and item 6 referring to stress; Cronbach alpha 0.82*

Source: Research

Table 9 ANOVA for simple linear regression (change and stress management predicting resistance to change)

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11.068	1	11.068	15.451	0.000[b]
	Residual	71.637	100	0.716		
	Total	82.706	101			

a. Dependent Variable: Resistance to change
b. Predictor (Constant): Change and stress management

Source: Research

Table 10 Coefficients table of simple linear regression

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		β	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	4.088	0.391	– 0.366	10.465	0.000
	Change and stress management	– 0.419	0.107		– 3.931	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Resistance to change

Source: Research

The results of the regression indicated that change management explained 13.6% of the variation in resistance to change ($F(1,100) = 15.451$, $p = 0.000$) confirming hypothesis *H4*. Resistance to change decreased 0.419 for each point of change and stress management. Change management encompassing communication with the employees, presenting to employee's new roles and responsibilities, gaining commitment and employee involvement in the change process proves to be a good strategy to reduce resistance to change. Especially when a manager is aware of stress caused by changes and manages it an effective way. This way employees feel in control of the change process and responsible for the success of this process (Belak & Ušljebrka, 2014).

4. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the research was to analyze characteristics of change and stress management in enterprises in Croatia. The research showed that changes are perceived principally as a positive process. In the context of continuous change in contemporary environment employees are more aware that changes cannot be avoided, but rather embraced as a way of doing business (Matos Marques Simoes & Esposito, 2014; Smollan, 2015). This positive perception is more interesting in the light of COVID-19 pandemic where level of change is emphasized and generating the need for adaptation just to ensure safety and healthy working environment. Contrary to the hypothesis, the results showed that there are no differences in this perception depending on gender, job position (managerial vs. non-managerial), and age. Similar results were reported by Dukić et al. (2016) when analyzing the

management of technological changes in the state administration bodies of the Republic of Croatia. The lack of difference between age groups may be attributed to the fact that a majority of respondents (73.5%) were no older than 35. In this sense, both female and male respondents perceive changes positively to the same extent, as they are equally exposed to frequent and large changes that have occurred over the last 30 years (Piderit, 2000). Similarly, uneven distribution of respondents was in the category job position with 76.5% of the respondents representing non-managerial staff. Better dispersion of respondents across different categories could produce different results.

The difference was found between respondents with different level of education. Employees with higher level of education (bachelor's and master's degree) perceive change more positive than employees with high school degree. Education provides a certain level of safety in situations of uncertainty by imparting knowledge and skills that a person can apply in changed circumstances. Education also reduces the fear of the unknown and the possibility of job loss, by providing individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to adapt to new tasks and responsibilities. Probably, that is the reason why education is always accentuated when discussing resistance to change strategies. It prepares employees for future organizational needs and develops their skills and readiness to accept changes.

Organizations mostly implement innovative changes (58.8%), which are inherent to micro- (62.5%), small- (58.6%), and medium-sized organizations (68.3%). The difference was only found in comparison to large organizations, which are mostly exposed to adaptive changes (66.7%). Adaptive changes are the simplest and easy to implement. Large organizations ordinarily have established routines that enable these changes. On that subject Ford (2009, p. 306) argued that "routines can prompt organizations to regularly scan environments and question extant states relative to more desirable alternatives". Future research might benefit from using some other types of change and their presence in organizations of different sizes.

The people change has proved to be the most common reason for change, as opposed to strategy change. Since people change represents a derived change, reflecting all other changes in the organization, especially technological changes and changes in organizational structure (Sikavica & Novak, 1999; Belak & Ušljebrka, 2014), it is the most observable change. Strategy is long-term plan and is not expected to change often. In today's business environment, organizations create broad strategies that can be easily adapted to changing conditions without requiring formal changes. Respondents from micro organizations did not report any strategy changes, likely because formal strategy formulation is not common in micro and small organizations (Krajnović, Lordanić-Lukavac & Jović, 2012; Čengić, 2010; Rašić & Ćurić, 2011).

Even though respondents form large and small organizations agreed upon the most common reason for change (i.e. people change), all other reasons are differently represented for all sizes of organizations. This could mean that in today's environment there are many sources of change and all must be taken into consideration. Grouping them in category of internal and external could provide precise information.

The study showed differences in perceiving resistance to change for non-managerial and managerial staff. This is because employees at different hierarchical levels generally have different availability of information and knowledge about the organization.

Fear of the new was identified as the most common reason for resistance to change (54.9%). In this sense, "constant counseling and education of employees" proved to be most useful mode of reducing resistance to change (29.4%). Employees demonstrate fear because of lack of information and uncertainty associated with change. Providing support for employees lessens their insecurity and can assist in gaining employees' commitment to change (Belak & Ušljebrka, 2014; Veloso-Besio, Cuadra-Peralta, Gil-Rodríguez, Ponce-Correa & Sjöberg-Tapia, 2019).

62.5% of managerial staff identified "misunderstanding and lack of trust between employees and managers" as the most common reason for resistance to change. However, only

8.3% of them viewed "building trust in management" as an effective way to reduce resistance to change, which seems somewhat contradictory. Probably most of these respondents referred to the first part of the statement ("misunderstanding…"). Necessity for better clarification of changes is visible in all other suggested modes and "built trust in management" could be then perceived as their results. Separately listed "misunderstanding…" and "lack of trust between employees and managers" would have probably offered more precise information.

Many researchers have confirmed that providing information, communication and employees involvement in change process influences resistance to change (Oreg, 2006; Allen et al. 2007; Matos Marques Simoes & Esposito, 2014; Husain, 2013). Consistent with the literature the importance of appropriate approach to change and stress management for reducing resistance to change is confirmed by this research. Even though every textbook about change management will emphasize these strategies for reducing resistance to change, in practice more progress must be made. As presented earlier, people change is derived from any change and therefore employees should be in focus of change management strategy and not incidental activity. The presence of stress in the process of change is inevitable. These findings have indicated moderate level of stress but that does not diminish the importance of stress management since employees have to cope with the stress to commit to the change (Dahl, 2011; Smollan, 2015; Mukerjee et al., 2021). Especially since previous research has linked poor stress-coping to the deterioration of health (Mohammed, Chan, Ahmad, Dusic, Boglarsky, Blessinger & Zeine, 2020; Sidhu, Singh, Virdi & Kumar, 2020).

With the intention of expanding the literature on change and stress management, especially in the context of Croatia, this study contributes empirical evidence by testing the theoretical assumption on types of change, reasons for change, reasons for resistance to change and modes of reducing resistance to change. The findings also show that the change management influences resistance to change and provides a premise for further related studies, especially in finding most suitable strategies in different phases of change process.

In addition to its theoretical implications, this study has several practical implications. Firstly, identifying the types of changes that are present in an organization prompts managers to consider whether some other type of changes are necessary. All types of changes (adaptive, innovative, and radically innovative) are important, as they have different impacts on business performance. Adaptive changes help organizations to adapt and respond to changing market conditions, while innovative changes help them to keep up with market trends and stay ahead of competitors. Radically innovative changes are necessary when an organization needs to regain its competitive edge. Secondly, different sources of change require different strategies for coping with them. Awareness of the incentive for change also provides more time for organizations to adapt to new circumstances. Thirdly, the findings show that depending on job position perception of change and stress management differs. To ensure commitment to changes, managers must be aware of employees' perspectives throughout change process. This way they have an opportunity to target the problems and find more suitable strategies for reducing resistance to change.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper offers an empirical glimpse into change and stress management in Croatian enterprises. The results provided valuable insight in perception of change, types of changes common in organizations, level of resistance to change, reasons for change, as well as reasons and modes for resistance to change, and the effect of change and stress management on resistance to change.

Some limitations must be kept in mind when evaluating the presented study results. Firstly, we used purposive sampling which recruits just a particular slice of the population. This limits the extent to which findings can be generalized. Random sampling would enable more precise conclusion. Secondly, a better refinement of the change and stress management scale would yield more precise results. Thirdly, stress management was only modestly covered by the questionnaire.

Deeper understanding of stress and stress management and its effects on employees' motivation and behavior could be fruitful stream of futures studies. In addition, an issue for future research could be to determine effectiveness of different strategies related to reducing resistance to change. Also, studies on differences between change management in private and public sector would be welcomed.

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