

Szelagowska-Rudzka, Katarzyna

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**Direct Participation of a Higher Education Institution Employees  
in the Organisational Change Process – a Study Report**

**Katarzyna Szelałowska-Rudzka**

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## Direct Participation of a Higher Education Institution Employees in the Organisational Change Process – a Study Report

**JEL Classification:** I23; M12; M54

**Keywords:** *employee direct participation; organizational changes; higher education institutions; the cycle of organisational change process, employee resistance to change*

### Abstract

Changes in the organisation require its adjustment through the process of organisational change. For changes to bring expected, positive results, all employees should be involved. Employee direct participation is one of the most effective methods of winning them for change and leading them to positive reaction in form of cooperation, engagement and reduction of resistance. The objective of this study is to analyse the process of change of the organisational structure (number of departments) at a faculty of a Pomeranian university, in terms of direct participation of the research and teaching and the teaching staff in the process. The study involved direct polling. The study sample (the faculty and its employees) has been intentionally selected. The study revealed that the employees participate in the change cycle in a limited way, indifference and resistance being their main attitudes. The results suggest that causes of this state are the autocratic style of the change initiators, little time devoted to involve employees in the process, and the negative atmosphere caused by staff rotation (dominant internal factor).

### Introduction

Organizational changes are a characteristic feature of today's organizations that have to adapt to the environment (technological progress, changes in customer needs and expectations, growing competition). The effectiveness of the change process is related to the social factor (Czerska, 1996, p. 145; Igielski, 2015, p. 216). In order for employees to become allies of change and for the change to be effective and reach the destination, employees must be attracted and involved in the process (Grobela & Marciszewska, 2016b, p. 96; Westhuizen et al., 2012; Ignyś, 2014, pp. 31-34), the atmosphere and possibility of creative action must be introduced (Sobka, 2014, p. 32), and motivation, sense of security, access to information, time to get acquainted with the change, adaptation to it and, above all, the possibility of direct participation in the process must be assured (Czerska, 1996, pp. 145-151; Zarębska, 2002, pp. 157, 197; Hodgkinson, 1999, p. 2; Strykowska, 2010, pp. 11,14; Ignyś, 2014, pp. 26-28).

Direct participation of employees designates their individual and group participation in decision-making processes relevant to the company and employees and their functioning in the life of the organization (Moczulska 2008, pp. 20-24). It can refer to issues of various scope, all or selected stages of the decision-making process, be formal, informal, actual, perceived, passive or active. The first one involves the employees' right to information, being heard, being able to speak out, and advise. The latter includes the right to object, to consent, to common dispute settlement and to decide independently (Szelałowska-Rudzka, 2015, p. 479).

Among the determinants of participation, the management style (Summers & Hymen, 2005), attitudes and behaviors (also ethical) of superiors (Grobela & Marciszewska, 2016a, p. 139; Kizielewicz, 2015, p. 186; Mowbray et al., 2015, pp. 392- 393) play an important role. Participatory (democratic) and consultative styles are conducive to participation; autocratic style is unfavorable (Szelałowska-Rudzka, 2015, pp. 479-480). Thoughtful executives engage subordinates in the change process to make them react appropriately – cooperate and minimize resistance. They are

responsible for shaping the internal determinants (strategies, communication, financial conditions) to limit the negative influence of external factors (legal, economic, social) and to support employee participation in the change process (Szelągowska-Rudzka, 2016, pp. 52-53; Sobka, 2014, pp. 14-17).

The aim of the study is to analyze direct participation of the research and teaching staff and the teaching staff in the process of changing the organizational structure (the number of departments) of a faculty in a Pomeranian university.

## Research method

The study was led with a direct questionnaire developed by the author (Kaczmarczyk, 1999, pp. 219, 227). It consists of 11 questions and respondent's particulars and concerns the willingness and ability to participate in change, the intensity of participation (passive, active), information sources, techniques and forms of participation, management style, attitudes and behaviors of the deanery, employees' reactions to change, and internal and external determinants of these reactions. The study was conducted in March 2017, among the research and teaching staff and the teaching staff of a Pomeranian public university faculty, in which a change of organizational structure had began during the winter term of 2016/2017. The Dean of the faculty gave a written consent. The questionnaires were given to respondents personally or left in the offices of their departments. Completed questionnaires were brought back to the offices or given directly to the author.

## Results of the study

The study involved 61 people (out of 77 employees), 61% women and 39% men. The group consisted mainly of regular employees – 85% (15% were managing staff), the research and teaching staff constituted 67% (teaching staff – 33%), employees with job seniority of 17-25 years constituted 49%, those of job seniority of over 25 years – 28% (up to 8 years - 10%, 9-16 years - 13%). Only 67% of respondents (41 people) provided their academic degree/title, and these were mainly PhD (71%) (professors – 12%, associate professors – 10%, holders of master's degree – 7%). The results of the study are presented in Tables 1-7.

**Table 1.** The willingness to participate in the change of the faculty organizational structure and its improvement

Willingness	Responses (%)				
	definitely agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	definitely disagree
to participate in the change of the faculty organizational structure (number of departments)	20	39	15	20	6
to submit ideas and suggestions for improvements related to the change of the faculty organizational structure	25	36	15	18	6
to submit ideas and suggestions for improvements concerning: a) the faculty organizational matters	20	57	7	11	5
b) the faculty didactics	33	51	6	5	5
c) scientific development of the faculty members	30	44	8	15	3

Source: own study based on the research results.

Most of the staff (59% - *definitely agree* and *agree* in total) are willing to participate in the change in the faculty organizational structure, submit ideas and suggestions for improvement of the didactics – 84%, organizational matters – 77%, and scientific development of the employees – 74% (Table 1). Yet, they possess rather limited capabilities concerning the participation in the change in the faculty organizational structure – 56% (*disagree* and *definitely disagree* in total) (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Ability to participate in the organizational change and to engage in the faculty affairs

Ability	Responses (%)				
	definitely agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	definitely disagree
to participate in the change of the faculty organizational structure (number of departments)	11	13	20	33	23
to submit ideas and suggestions for improvements related to the change of the faculty organizational structure	12	16	26	30	17
to submit ideas and suggestions for improvements concerning: a) the faculty organizational matters	13	23	18	30	16
b) the faculty didactics	16	38	15	21	10
c) scientific development of the faculty members	15	21	21	30	13

Source: own study based on the research results.

**Table 3.** The way of participating in the change declared by respondents

Process stage	Way of participation in decision-making (%)						
	Infor- ming	Being able to speak out	Advising	Right to object	Common dispute settlement	Independent decision - making	Lack of partic- ipation
Recognition of the problem – the need for change	30	13	3	2	8	2	42
Collecting information on the problem- atic situation (the need for change)	23	5	5	0	8	2	57
Searching for solutions	23	11	3	0	12	0	51
Solution evaluation	20	11	3	2	10	0	54
Choice of the ultimate solution	30	7	0	1	13	0	49
Preparation for implementation of the chosen solution (change)	26	11	2	0	11	2	48
Implementation of the chosen solution	33	12	3	0	10	2	39

Source: own study based on the research results.

Despite their willingness and certain abilities, a significant percentage of respondents (39% to 57%) state they do not actually participate in the process of changing the faculty organizational structure. This includes gathering information related to change (57%), search for possible solutions (55%), and their evaluation (51%). Participation is mostly passive and is based primarily on information, less frequently on the possibility of speaking out. It mainly concerns implementation of the chosen solution (48%) and recognition of the need for change (46%). Active participation (responses: *right to object*, *common dispute settlement*, and *independent decision-making*) is much rarer (Table 3) and involves mainly the managing staff and senior academic staff members (who most often responded, "I participate in common dispute settlement").

Employees are informed about the change usually by the immediate supervisor - 66%, the deanery, or their associates – 62% each. The significance of informal communication (gossip) is relatively large – 54%. The most frequent techniques for employee participation are information meetings with faculty authorities – 64% or departmental meetings – 57% (less commonly group solution search - 13%, or submitting one's own ideas - 10%).

In terms of the choice of individual, group or both forms of participation in the change, 67% of respondents declare lack of participation in any of them. This is surprising due to the fact that group techniques (informational meetings) were most commonly indicated.

**Table 4.** How change designers make decisions about changing the faculty organiz. structure

No.	Way of decision-making	Responses (%)
1.	Individually	46
2.	By consulting individual employees	7

3.	By consulting the situation (solution) with a group of employees	31
4.	Together with employees	8
5.	I do not know	8

Source: own study based on the research results.

In the opinion of 53% of respondents authorities apply the autocratic style (total of lines 1, 2), making the decision about the change without employee participation. 31% of them indicate the consultative style (line 3), and only 8% indicate the participatory style (line 4) (Table 4).

**Table 5.** Attitudes and behaviors of the change designers of the faculty organizational structure

Statement	Responses (%)				
	strongly agree	agree	I don't know	disagree	strongly disagree
They set clear goal connected to the change	8	38	16	25	13
They support employees in the implementation of goals	3	21,5	31	23	21,5
They work in agreement with employees	3	21	28	23	23
They inform employees about results	2	53	18	16	11
They take into account employees' advice and opinions	5	11	38	25	21
In a difficult situation employees can count on their support	8	17	39	16	20
They treat employees on a subjective basis (employees are important)	11	25	33	16	15
They care about employees and their future at the university	7	21	36	16	20
They are honest and trustworthy	6,5	28	46	6,5	13
They can win employees to cooperate in the process of organiz. change	8	11	39	25	17

Source: own study based on the research results.

**Table 6.** Respondents' reactions to the change in the faculty organizational structure

Respondents' reaction to the change:		Responses (%)*
dominant	- particular	
The change is neutral to me because:		31
I only engage when it is beneficial for me		15
I only engage when it is possible		1
I engage in the change, actively cooperating in implementation		23
I resist the change because:		30
	- I am not fully informed about it	18
	- I do not know why it is being implemented	13
	- I am afraid that it is going to be adverse for me	10
	- I have no confidence in the managing staff and their change design	8
	- I was not invited to participate in the change	10
	- I have bad previous experience with the way of implementing changes at the faculty	5
	- others	2

\* People who responded, "I resist" could indicate more than one specific cause for this reaction, and their percentage is related to the number of all respondents.

Source: own study based on the research results.

In addition, the respondents believe that the faculty authorities do not take into account the advice and opinions of employees in the process of changing the organizational structure – 47% (*disagree* and *strongly disagree*), they do not work in agreement with employees – 46%, they do not support employees in the implementation of targets connected to the change – 44.5%, and they are not able to win the employees to cooperate in the change – 42%. A high percentage of respondents have no opinion on whether the change designers are honest and trustworthy – 46%. In turn, the respondents favorably refer to the fact that the Dean's office informs the staff about results – 55%, and sets clear goals connected to the change – 46% (Table 5).

Employees of the studied faculty react with indifference (31%) and resistance (30%) to rebuilding its organizational structure. 23% of the respondents actively participate in the change,

including almost all managers (7 out of 9 – 11% of all respondents) and senior academic staff members (professors and associate prof. – 11% of the total number of respondents) (Table 6).

**Table 7.** The impact of the following factors on the behavior of respondents in relation to the change in the faculty organizational structure

Factors	Responses (%)					
	very big	big	neither big nor small	small	very small	none
The atmosphere at the university caused by staff rotation	48	33	11	1	0	7
Strategy of the University	30	24	30	5	5	6
Strategy of the Faculty	25	39	23	2	3	8
System of motivating faculty employees	17	25	28	11	8	11
Financial situation of faculty	26	23	28	10	3	8
The way the faculty is perceived by other core units of the university	12	26	31	8	8	15
The attitude/actions of immediate supervisors	23	41	21	5	3	7
Work on the new law on higher education (the so-called 2.0) and resulting possible directions of changing the system	15	34	28	5	5	13
The country's demographic situation	3	31	31	7	15	13
General atmosphere in the country concerning science and higher education institutions	17	33	21	13	3	13

Source: own study based on the research results.

Employees' reactions to the faculty organizational change are mainly influenced by the atmosphere at the university related to staff rotation – 81% (responses *very big* and *big*). Next factors are the strategy of the faculty, and the attitude (actions) of immediate supervisors – 64% each (internal factors). The least significant determinants are the demographic situation of the country (34%) and how the faculty is perceived by other units of the university (38%) (Table 7).

## Conclusions

The study revealed that:

- ☐ The staff have greater motivation than possibilities to participate in the change of the organizational structure and to submit suggestions for improvement.
- ☐ Their participation in the change often has a passive form and consists in being informed.
- ☐ Active participation is rare and generally limited to senior academic staff members (professors and associate professors) and managerial positions.
- ☐ A significant percentage of respondents declare lack of participation in the change.
- ☐ The limited scope and dissemination of employee participation is evidenced by the fact that they are unable to properly identify the group form of their participation in the whole process, although group participatory techniques (information meetings) are commonly used.
- ☐ The respondents claim that the designers of the change most often use the autocratic style adverse to participation; the consultative or participatory styles are applied sporadically.
- ☐ Their attitudes and actions towards subordinates are variously assessed, also negatively.
- ☐ Employees are usually indifferent to the change or resist it, although only one in five is engaged.
- ☐ The most significant internal determinant of the respondents' reactions to the change is the atmosphere at the university linked to staff rotation and the attitude of the immediate supervisor. The most significant external factors are the overall atmosphere in the country around science and higher education, and work on the new law 2.0.

## Summary

The study results show that the direct participation of the research and teaching staff and the teaching staff occurs to a small extent at the faculty undergoing an organizational change. Most frequently it has a passive form (co-operation) including informing, less commonly speaking out. Active participation (co-decision) is almost non-existent. This state of affairs is caused by the autocratic style of the deanery, most often identified by the respondents, and also the unfavorable internal factor – the atmosphere at the university connected to the rotation of the employees.

Little direct employee participation does not positively influence employees' attitudes towards the change – cooperation and engagement, and does not counteract negative feedback – resistance. Perhaps the employees were included too late, hence there was no time to invite them to a full participation in all stages of the process, which could have (in the light of the source literature) translated into their greater and more effective collaboration in the change cycle.

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