



The Reactions of Post-Soviet Countries Employees to Changes Carried Out by Organizations in Higher Education: Cases of Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Belarusian State Colleges

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the scale created by authors for determining employees' attitudes towards changes (employees' attitude towards changes - EATC) and its psychometric characteristics. The results of the research, which includes staff from three state colleges from three countries (N = 222) are also analyzed. The aim of this research is by comparing the attitudes of employees of different post-Soviet state colleges to identify the main challenges that heads of organizations face. The results of the research show that there is a certain gap between the benefits of changes which employees perceive, and their coworkers expressed perception of changes. It should be emphasized that the internal opposition, created by direct (linear) heads, emerges as a significant organizational problem that should be considered by the organizational leadership implementing the changes.

INTRODUCTION

Relevance and level of problem exploration. Colleges training competitive specialists are faced with the task of maintaining maximum openness to trends in the national and international markets, be capable to anticipate them and flexibly change. In this context, it is reasonable to assess the experience of countries that need to follow similar paths of transformation. Researchers studying development trends of higher education in Eastern and Central Europe draw attention to the influence of historical experience in the long-term transformational perspective (Kwiek, 2001; Gaw-

licz and Starnawski, 2018; etc.), but their results are still ambiguous (Dakowska, 2017). In recent years, considerable attention has been devoted to various external challenges related to the quality of higher education and response to the needs of society (Tarlea, 2017; Dobbins and Kwiek, 2017; Dakowska, 2017; etc.). On the one hand, higher education sector is currently undergoing major structural changes, and insufficient financing of the sector remains an important factor (Dlouha et al., 2017), while on the other hand, specific problems of human resource management in organizations also have to be taken into account, which affects employees' reactions to changes because success of the implementation of reforms are crucial to that (Van Emmerik et al., 2009; Dasborough et al., 2015). In this context, the greatest negative impact on the attitude towards changes arises from bad workplace relations and stress (Vakola and Nikolaou, 2005), while Nitta et al. (2014) emphasizes that difficulties always arise when employees do not understand the goals of reorganization and how to achieve them, they are not empowered to act following the vision of change, and heads do not know how to communicate the vision of change to staff. These are just some of the challenges related to employees' attitudes that heads of organizations face, especially considering that the region is not homogeneous according to both macroeconomic and educational policy characteristics (Gawlicz and Starnawski, 2018), and in this context there is a lack of research of management of change in higher education. Therefore, *research problem* is formulated using questions how employees respond to changes and what are the main challenges for the heads implementing changes in colleges in Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine.

The aim of the research is to identify the main challenges that heads of organizations face by comparing attitudes of employees of different post-Soviet state colleges to changes.

Objectives of the research: a) Analyze theoretical aspects of employees' attitude towards changes, b) Identify the attitude of employees towards changes in the view of their own, colleagues and activities, and c) Identify personal employee's attitude to the current changes in their workplace and how they consider their head's position on the issue of change.

Limitations of the research. Only employees' attitudes influenced by organizational factors were analyzed, and therefore psychological, cultural or political determinants were not analyzed. Research was conducted in three state colleges in different countries, therefore, to make broader generalizations in the future, the research should be repeated in a larger sample, taking into account the scale of the changes implemented in different countries, which may affect attitudes of respondents.

Further research directions. It would make sense in the future to compare cultural determinants and their impact on the attitude of employees to changes. The research should also include staff of other European colleges in a larger sample by producing questionnaires in the languages of those respondents.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Studies dealing with the implementation of changes in higher education organizations single out several factors influencing implementation of decisions. B. Stensaker et al. (2014) surveyed 26 decision makers of European universities. The study demonstrated that changes were perceived as highly dependent on leadership, decision-making procedures, communication and assessment. Another study confirmed that lack of communication and participants' low involvement during changes were emphasized as important factors, contributing to resistance and that they were related to organizational culture (Canning and Found, 2015). In addition, information about changes was positively related to the psychological implementation of agreements and the attitude to changes (van den Heuvel et al., 2017), as well as to greater confidence, enabling to achieve the set results (Vosse and Aliyu, 2018).

In other words, internal quality of communication, the ability to clearly report changes and their benefits reduce resistance to changes and ensure employees' support. In this case, high requirements are raised to the management personnel of the organizations. Managers must be alert to express loyalty more. They should also acknowledge their role generating positive experience of the process, which is a precondition for developing change possibilities at the employees' level (Stensaker and Meyer, 2011). In higher education, the manager's support, work control and professional development possibilities are related to a more favourable assessment of organizational changes (van Emmerik et al., 2009). In addition, the heads of higher education institutions should perceive that employees react to changes differently and for this reason they should not be perceived as one single group (Dasborough et al., 2015), therefore, higher education policy makers are advised to evaluate different emotional responses (Tran et al., 2017).

Employees' attitude can be described as a diagnostic tool that collects a lot of information under controlled conditions. It works as a communication tool enabling employees to express their satisfaction and ideas for improvement as well as to propose unique and practical information about management that helps to solve problems (Anderson, 1974). In this case, it is important what emotional reactions are caused by changes implemented in the organization and how these reactions are managed. It was found that persons who experienced greater levels of stress showed lower commitment and greater reluctance to accept organizational change interventions (Vakola and Nikolaou, 2005), while positive climate increased the motivation of teachers of higher education institutions (Specht et al., 2018). The greatest negative impact on the attitude towards changes arises due to bad working relationships (Vakola and Nikolaou, 2005), the more so that some studies demonstrate that stress is also often experienced by middle managers of higher education institutions, and the source of this stress is the leadership of the organization (Chan et al., 2018), while leaders' high level emotional intelligence contributes to preparation of employees for future changes (Gelaidan et al., 2018). Another study emphasizes that emotions can become an obstacle to change, and how people who cannot mobilize themselves and behave differently become less inclined to discuss changes (Eriksson, 2004). When the management implements mutual commitments and builds confidence, this enables to respond to organizational changes more constructively compared with the focus on management of organizational changes as an independent event (van den Heuvel et al., 2016). Under conditions of economic transition, employees who are more satisfied with their job are more inclined to be take part in the organizational change process than employees whose job satisfaction is lower (Alas and Wadi, 2006). According to the authors, the employees who assessed their organizational culture as being stronger are more willing to participate in the implementation of organizational changes and are more satisfied with their jobs and managers.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The instrument used for the research was created based on the analysis of scientific literature and by selecting publications using keywords "higher education", "changes", "attitudes of employees" and by focusing on magazines indexed in SCOPUS and WOS databases, which quartile is not lower than Q3. In this way, 15 publications that were published between 2004 and 2018 were selected (Eriksson, 2004; Vakola and Nikolaou, 2005; Alas and Vadi, 2006; Armenakis et al., 2007; Walker et al., 2007; van Emmerik et al., 2009; Stensaker and Meyer, 2011; Hyde, 2012; Carter et al., 2013; Stensaker et al., 2014; Dasborough et al., 2015; Canning and Found, 2015; Fu et al., 2016; van den Heuvel et al., 2017; Vosse and Aliyu, 2018).

The scale created by authors includes of 3 sub-scales, which in total consist of 16 statements. The first sub-scale "Changes for the Employee" consists of 9 statements (two statements are reversed). This sub-scale measures employee's attitude to the personal benefit he or she expects (or not) to receive, appropriateness of changes methods implementation and usefulness of the investments used. The two negative statements aim at identifying the employee's stress and fear of losing job. The purpose of second sub-scale "Changes for Colleagues" (3 statements) is to determine how the employee participating in the survey sees his or her colleagues in the changing environment with regard to the age and responsibilities of employees, as well as when comparing "what was before" and "what is now". Third sub-scale "Changes for Activities" (4 statements) aims at identifying employee's attitude to the impact of change on the activities undertaken at the state level, at the organizational level, at the head's level, at the colleagues' level and at the employee's own level.

Table 1. Psychometric scale characteristics (N = 222)

Sub-scales	Number of statements	Cronbach's Alpha	Spearman Brown	Explained spread percentage % of variance	Factor weight (L)		
					min.	mean	max.
Changes for the Employee	9	0.85	0.84	34.38	0.37	0.66	0.82
Changes for Colleagues	3	0.61	—	57.59	0.54	0.74	0.87
Changes for Activities	4	0.82	0.77	65.68	0.68	0.81	0.87

Source: composed by authors

Examples of each of the three sub-scales statements and their internal consistency are given in Table 1. Closer Cronbach's Alpha coefficient value to 1 indicates the greater scale measurement accuracy. Values below 0.60 are acceptable when the scale / sub-scale is composed only by a few statements (Hair et al., 2009) or it is a newly created instrument (Nunnally, 1978). In the case of this scale, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of one sub-scale is not high, but higher than 0.60. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient depends on the length of the scale - the more individual statements make up the sub-scale, the higher coefficient can be. Therefore, the validity of the scale in regard of repeated execution was verified by the Spearman Brown statistical correlation coefficient of the two variables measured in the range of a sub-scale. Spearman Brown coefficient value of 0.60 is acceptable when using questionnaires which are still being developed (Brace et al., 2004) and it should be noted that the Spearman-Brown value is always lower than the Cronbach Alpha coefficient (Vveinhardt and Gulbovaitė, 2018) Explained factor spread must be higher than the permissible 10% minimum limit, i.e. if the factor explained spread in the sub-scale is lower than the specified allowed limit, then this indicates that the analyzed sub-scale contains statements that reduce the spread. The percentage of explained spread in the analyzed scale meets the requirements. Minimum factor weight (L) can not be lower than 0.3. If it is less than 0.3, this indicates that an incorrect statement is in the sub-scale. In this case the minimum factor weight is from 0.37 to 0.68 in all sub-scales (Vveinhardt, 2012).

Table 2 shows intercorrelations of sub-scales which are strong and very strong. All sub-scales are statistically reliable, because p is 0.000. Additionally, besides already presented sub-scales, respondents were given two open type questions: "Please, finish the thought: Changes in my workplace for me are: ..." and "Please, finish the thought: "In my opinion, changes for our organization's

head are: ...". These questions were aimed to identify personal employee's attitude to the current changes in their workplace and how they view their head's position on the issue of change.

Table 2. Intercorrelation among sub-scales

<i>Sub-scales</i>		<i>Changes for the Employee</i>	<i>Changes for Activities</i>	<i>Changes for Colleagues</i>
Changes for the Employee	Pearson Correlation	1	.829**	.707**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	222	222	222
Changes for Activities	Pearson Correlation	.829**	1	.725**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	222	222	222
Changes for Colleagues	Pearson Correlation	.707**	.725**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	222	222	222
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				
0,8<r<=1		Correlation is very strong		
0,6<r<=0.8		Strong correlation		

Source: composed by authors

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

The survey was conducted using an online survey platform, guaranteeing anonymity of respondents and limiting the possibility to fill out a questionnaire more than once. Authors have developed, adapted and verified questionnaire in different languages (Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Russian) for this research. The survey was conducted with the consent of the college' heads. The survey involved 222 respondents (76 in Lithuania, 75 in Ukraine and 71 in Belarus) from three similar size state colleges. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

<i>Country, sample</i>	<i>Lithuania N=76 %</i>	<i>Ukraine N=75 %</i>	<i>Belarus N=71 %</i>
<i>Age of employees</i>			
23-30	14.5	5.3	14.1
31-40	26.3	30.7	38.0
41-50	30.3	46.7	23.9
51-60	26.3	16.0	21.1
61 and over	2.6	1.3	2.8
<i>Gender of employees</i>			
Male	19.7	21.3	42.3
Female	80.3	78.7	57.7
<i>Position of employees</i>			
Administrative staff	38.2	2.7	9.9
Administrative staff and lecturer	11.8	2.7	14.1
Head of unit	5.3	1.3	8.5

<i>Country, sample</i>	<i>Lithuania</i> N=76 %	<i>Ukraine</i> N=75 %	<i>Belarus</i> N=71 %
Head of unit and lecturer	9.2	10.7	9.9
Lecturer	35.5	82.7	57.7

Source: composed by authors

According to age the majority of respondents were individuals aged from 31 to 60. In this context, the Ukrainian group stood out with the largest number of respondents 41-50 years old (46.7%). The age percentage of respondents who participated in the research, in range from 31 to 60 years make similar groups, i.e. in the case of Lithuania it is 82.9%, in the case of Ukraine 93.4%, and Belarus - 83%. According to the gender, the distribution of respondents is quite similar in Lithuanian and Ukrainian colleges, because in the education system, according to the Statistics Department, more women than men are employed. However, in the case of Belarus, the sample number of respondents in regard to age is similar. Analysis according to position showed that working only as a lecturer and working as a lecturer while holding position of unit's head / administrative staff, group percentage distributed as follows: 56.5% (Lithuania), 96.1% (Ukraine), 81.7% and (Belarus).

The results of the research show (Table 4) that the biggest change-related optimism is demonstrated by the Belarusian respondents (the average is 50.7%, in Lithuania respectively - 34.6% and in Ukraine - 24.4%). Similar trends persist when dividing respondents according to self-perceived benefits (Belarus - 78.4%, Lithuania 63.7%, Ukraine -39%) and benefits for colleagues as well as organization sub-scales (Belarus - 80.6%, Lithuania - 45.1%, Ukraine -29.9%). However, unlike Lithuanian and Ukrainian respondents, Belarusian respondents tend to attribute greater benefit of changes for the organization. On the other hand, respondents in the latter country are least likely to associate the changes with the stress and fears of losing their job (respectively 9.9% and 4.2%), unlike in Ukraine (68% and 41.3% respectively) and in Lithuania (34.2% and 44.7% respectively), which has a significant impact on employees' resistance to change and the success of their implementation, because more stressed individuals show less commitment and greater reluctance to take organizational change interventions (Vakola and Nikolaou, 2005). In addition, researchers point out that organization heads must be particularly attentive to their behavior and express higher loyalty. They should also take responsibility for their role in generating a positive process experience, which is a prerequisite for creating positive change possibilities at the employee level (Stensaker and Meyer, 2011).

Our research results show that in this respect the situation is most favorable in Belarus, where 94.3% respondents say that the direct head accepts changes in the organization, unlike in Lithuania and Ukraine (44.7% and 25.3% respectively). Similar situation is with the criterion of the awareness of change. 94.3% of respondents in this country state that "the goals of the changes currently being implemented in the workplace are clear to me", while it is 37.4% in Ukraine and 54% in Lithuania. A significant part of respondents (especially in Lithuania and Ukraine) is not sure about the fact that there takes place break in the quality of work. That is, either this change is not actualized in the internal communication or does not cover the entire organization's units. In addition, strong doubts about the appropriateness of investment and the methods used by organizations was expressed in all three cases, which is most clearly reflected in cases of Ukraine and Lithuania.

The overall psychological "notion" of supporting / not supporting change is important in an organization, which in the research not only varied considerably, but also raised a number of questions for further research. This notion includes not only the attitudes of respondents themselves, but also their reflected attitudes of co-workers. Thus, the tendency emerges that in all three cases the informants demonstrate greater acceptance of the changes than their counterparts do. The

biggest difference between individual and reflective evaluation of co-workers is in the case of Ukraine, where the difference is 18.7 percentage points (in the case of Lithuania 6.6%, and Belarus - 11.3%).

Table 4. The attitude of employees towards changes in the view of their own, colleagues and activities

Country	Lithuania			Ukraine			Belarus		
Sample	N=76			N=75			N=71		
Statements	No	Doubts	Yes	No	Doubts	Yes	No	Doubts	Yes
Answer groups									
The changes currently taking place in my workplace will benefit me as an employee personally	6.6	51.3	42.1	38.6	24	37.4	2.8	8.5	88.7
My peer colleagues believe in benefits of changes that are currently taking place in our workplace	6.5	57.9	35.5	25.4	56	18.7	5.6	16.9	77.4
I believe that proposed organizational changes will have a positive effect on our activities	6.6	46.1	47.4	34.7	29.3	36	1.4	9.9	88.7
We now must work differently in our organization than we used to	18.4	17.1	64.5	10.6	12	77.4	4.2	15.5	80.3
These changes will result in a higher salary for me	27.6	59.2	13.1	22.6	57.3	20	11.3	50.7	38
Change of my job assignments will increase my professional achievements	10.6	44.7	44.7	20	25.3	54.7	1.4	9.9	88.8
My direct head agrees with organization's ongoing changes	3.9	51.3	44.7	21.3	53.3	25.3	0	5.6	94.3
The goals of changes that are currently being implemented in my workplace are clear to me	10.5	35.5	54	48	14.7	37.4	0	5.6	94.4
The methods of implementing changes are acceptable to me	10.5	52.6	36.8	53.3	16	30.7	0	11.3	88.8
I have no doubt about the expediency of my organization's investments	9.2	22.4	68.4	10.7	30.7	58.6	1.4	40.8	57.8
Sufficient funds are allocated for improvement of the staff in my workplace	17.1	23.7	59.2	36	44	20	1.4	22.5	76
New organizational requirements do not exceed my abilities	5.2	21.1	73.7	26.7	20	53.3	2.8	11.3	85.9
Ongoing changes in my workplace are causing me a lot of additional stress	28.9	36.8	34.2	13.3	18.7	68	78.8	11.3	9.9
I am afraid that, due to the current changes, I can lose	26.3	28.9	44.7	20	38.7	41.3	84.5	11.3	4.2

Country	Lithuania			Ukraine			Belarus		
Sample	N=76			N=75			N=71		
Statements	No	Doubts	Yes	No	Doubts	Yes	No	Doubts	Yes
Answer groups									
my job									
Colleagues in the same positions as I am believe in the benefits of changes that are currently taking place in our workplace	11.8	57.9	30.2	20	68	12	2.8	28.2	69
The ongoing reform of higher educational institutions will improve our organization's position	9.2	61.8	28.9	36	44	20	0	21.1	78.8

Source: composed by authors

When analyzing respondents' answers to the open questions presented to them, it becomes meaningful to group them into three groups according to *understanding the meaning for oneself, relationship with the organization and at a national level, i.e. educational system* (distinguishing the most characteristic descriptions). The number and variety of isolated terms indicate differences between the dominant tendencies in the countries. *According to the personal relationship of employees in response to changes* in the case of Lithuania, the following terms can be distinguished: routine ("bored", "constant phenomenon"), uncertainty ("not defined, not explained", "acceptable, but their effectiveness is doubtful", "uncertainty for the future"); the need for personal development ("promotes learning, improvement", "related to my work and good work results"); challenge ("challenge", "new test"). *According to relationship with the organization*: the attractiveness of the organization to the market ("responding to the needs of the region"), operational efficiency ("increasing the quality and efficiency of work"). *At national level*: "possibility to improve and grow together with the processes in the country, to become part of those processes", "changes at the national level" can affect my organization, but they are still ambiguous, and their consequences are more frightening". Thus, although there is a perception that changes are necessary and can be beneficial to both the individual and the organization, there remains a strong sense of ambiguity and uncertainty about the future, weak understanding of oneself as an organizational system, both at the organizational and at the state level.

In the case of Ukraine *according to a personal relationship in response to changes* following components can be distinguished: denial ("these changes are undesirable to me", "trouble", "extra work", "changes are unjust"); personal development ("changes are needed", "personal growth", "stimulus for professional growth"); uncertainty ("I doubt it will be better", "it is not clear what's going on"). In *organizational context* following components can be distinguished: prestige of the organization ("opportunity to raise the prestige of institution", "stable wages and development of our institution"). *At national level*: damage to the optimal system ("destruction of technical schools and colleges", "doubtful attempts to reform the education system", "without a logical final result"), improvement of the system, competitiveness ("possibility to access the European educational area", "need to reform the education system", "better education for children").

In the case of Belarus *according to personal relationship*: actual ("necessary, dictated by the time", "clear and necessary"), improvement ("innovative process in which I participate", "expanding possibilities for development", "motivating to review methods of work"), uncertainty ("there will be more uncertainty than positive results"), distrust ("necessary for leadership only", "unnecessary, we just need to take in mind that we are working with a new generation", "new things not always lead to perfection"). *Organizational context*: improvement of activities ("positive effect on our activities", "will improve work of the college"). The relationship with state policy remained unexpressed.

In short, it is worth noting that concern for individual perspective is dominating and in individual cases, relating that to the activities of the entire organization, and only in the case of Ukraine, a specific dimension has emerged - concern for the need for improvement of the whole educational system.

It is significant how employees interpret the attitude of the organization's head towards changes and how this attitude is clear to them and how it can be viewed from the perspective of the organization. In the case of Lithuania, although statistically significant doubts have emerged about the personal benefits of change and the lack of loyalty of linear heads, responses to the open question relate efforts of a head to improve effectiveness of the organization's activities and increase competitiveness. Similar attitudes emerged in the case of Ukraine, but for a significant part of respondents' organization head's attitudes remain unclear. A certain emotional connection is also noticeable, understanding that changes are as stressful for employees as they are for heads, and together with that goes a belief that implementation of changes is "imposed from above". In the case of Belarus, stood out the head's behavior as a motivating factor, which could explain an exceptionally favorable attitude to changes.

CONCLUSIONS

This study draws attention to patterns and disturbances of changes which colleges in three different countries face. Research shows that employees' attitudes to changes depend on a wide range of organizational factors. That includes the quality of the organization's internal communication, employee awareness, a trust-based psychological climate, engagement and involvement in the process of changes, perception of the benefits for the individual and organization, and the leadership's loyalty to the organization implementing changes.

The general tendencies lead to conclusion that there is a certain tension between the benefits of changes which respondents perceive, and their coworkers expressed attitudes to changes. That is, the general notion (which is different in different countries) shows less optimism than the respondents themselves are demonstrating. This becomes evident both according to the age and position of coworkers whose attitudes are reflected. Identification of reasons of this contradiction requires additional research, taking into account the specifics of interpersonal communication, cultural aspects of organizations and climate of organizations, which may affect the way employees trust and how openly they express their attitudes on the changes that are being implemented. On the other hand, distrust of the expediency of investments, poorly perceived benefits of changes, encountered stress and uncertainty regarding the future can be a major disruptor that should be addressed both by government representatives who initiate reforms as well as by heads of individual organizations. In this case, it would be insufficient to raise employees' awareness of personal and organizational benefits of changes, because if there is no culture of trust which is consolidated by linear heads, and changes can only remain a beautiful declaration that does not guarantee significant changes.

The internal opposition, created by direct (linear) heads, emerges as a significant organizational problem that should be considered by the organizational leadership implementing the changes. Although it can be argued whether direct heads demonstrate greater support for changes, but their loyalty remains a relevant issue that is particularly acute in cases of Lithuania and Ukraine. This also determines workers' faith in qualitative changes of work. However, not only the employee's attitude to changes is important in the context of personal interests, but also how a person perceives oneself in the context of organization and the whole system transformations. These interpretations are influenced not only by the position of linear heads, but also by how clearly the head of the organization presents a position.

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