

EMPLOYEE DIRECT PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE PROCESS – PILOT STUDY REPORT

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Abstract

Organizational changes are the most sustained and inseparable elements of contemporary organizations. They produce positive results when all employees are engaged. Employee direct participation is one of the most effective ways to involve members of the organization in changes. The author has developed a model of employee participation in a cycle of the organizational change process. Its empirical verification and presentation of the results of the study is the aim of this paper. The research was conducted by means of a direct questionnaire and involved 197 respondents from the organizations located in Pomeranian Voivodeship.

Keywords: *employee direct participation, organizational change, organizational change process cycle, people's resistance towards change.*

1. Introduction

Change is a special feature of the modern economy. It results from the changeability of the environment, rapid technical and technological progress, growing competition and increasing demands of customers (Spodarczyk, 2016). Organizations, just as quickly and effectively have to face these changes (Studzeniecki, 2016), implementing organizational changes. All employees of the organizational hierarchy (Strykowska, 2010) should be included in the change process running smoothly. Their participation will cause them to become co-authors of change, the allies; they will display proper attitudes and behaviors towards it (cooperation instead of resistance), which will contribute to the effectiveness of the whole process. Developing teamwork, effective communication (Chandani, Mehta, Mall & Khokhar, 2016; Czerska, 1996), motivating to change (Czerska, 1996), choosing the right management style, are some of the ways to build social support for change. Employee direct participation proves particularly effective (Czerska, 1996; Zarębska, 2002;

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Hodgkinson, 1999; Moczulska, 2011; Mowbray, Wilkinson & Tse, 2015; Strykowska, 2010; Ignys, 2014; Pawlak, 2015). Employees involved in the organizational change process - from the first to the last stage - identify with the change, understand the reasons for it, accept the solutions developed, and engage in their implementation as they have been involved in decision-making. Thus, they gain the ability to influence their work situation, sense of objectivity and satisfaction (Pacheco & Webber, 2016), to influence and to be responsible for different areas and levels of organization functioning (Cierniak-Emerych, 2012; Chandani et al., 2016; Pacheco & Webber, 2016). Their reactions to change tend towards acceptance and commitment rather than resistance to change. The aim of the article is empirical verification of the author's model of employee participation in the change process cycle and presentation of the results of the study. The article consists of 4 parts: introduction, results, as well as chapters devoted to organizational change and direct employee participation, and research methodology and results.

2. Organizational changes and employee direct participation

Organizational change is „a process of modifying existing solutions to create another, more effective, organizational model” (Cabała, 2015, p. 134). It allows the adaptation to changes in the environment (meta-cause of organizational changes). Organizational change refers to the different areas of the organization's functioning (e.g., engineering and technology, information system, distribution and customer service, structures and processes leading to improving the mission, goals and tasks accomplishment) (Znańska-Kozłowska, 2011). Different types of organizational change may be distinguished. Based on various models and methods, it can be designed and implemented (Czermiński, Czerska, Nogalski, Rutka & Apanowicz, 2001; Sobka, 2014). However, every organizational change involves applying about 10% of the technique and 90% of psychology and sociology, which points to man – the designer and participant of change – as the main determinant of their efficiency (Czerska, 1996). The success of the whole undertaking depends on the involvement of the employees in the process, their reactions to the changes taking place. Therefore, attitudes and behaviors of members of the organization towards change (from co-operation through indifference to resistance) are crucial for their progress. The least desirable and the most dangerous, for process effectiveness, is resistance to change. According to L. Clarke (1997), it comes from the fact that change is perceived as something that is done outside of employees rather than with them. That is why it is so important to involve employees in the decision-making process for planning

and implementing the change, and to make employees co-authors of the changes. This action brings long-term positive results (Ignyś, 2014).

Not only managers (of different levels) can be the designers of change. Participatory model of the change process assumes that the initiators can also be regular employees, equipped with knowledge, skills, and motivation to change (Koźmiński & Piotrowski, 2013; Sobka, 2014). Participatory changes (bottom-up) are of particular importance for organizations, both for social reasons and for the ability of use them to optimize and improve the employees' knowledge organization and their external (e.g., the offer of the competition, supplier relationships) and internal processes knowledge (e.g., customer service and knowledge of their requirements, knowledge of the sphere of production, links between positions and organizational units from the perspective of the realization of mission, objectives and tasks of the organization) (Grobela & Marciszewska, 2016b; Westhuizen, Pacheco & Webber, 2012; Ignyś, 2014, pp. 31-34).

Employee direct participation in the organizational change process provides the following benefits (Czerska, 1996):

- it helps to understand the change, its essence, causes and expected effects better;
- it helps managers and employees dispose of existing beliefs, stereotypes and cultural norms that hinder change, and helps building and increasing mutual trust between superiors and subordinates;
- it improves and helps to rationalize the whole process of change;
- it engages people in the implementation of decisions they make;
- it helps employees to develop their capabilities and broaden their perspective on the organization;
- it helps employees to accept change faster, and managers to reduce control;
- it increases social control over change.

It also allows the use of employee creativity, their knowledge, skills and motivation to propose innovative solutions that improve the functioning of the organization (Stankiewicz & Moczulska, 2004), and increases the sense of subordinates' responsibility for the success of the organization (Ignyś, 2014).

Employee direct participation is their collective and individual involvement in the decision-making process about the company's performance at various levels of its organizational hierarchy, and employees as participants and producers of processes, principles, and conditions of their functioning in the organization. Its form can be group or individual, supported by a group or individual management techniques and methods. The first ones (group) include problem solving teams, autonomous teams, quality circles, goal management. The latter ones (individual) include, for example, work enrichment and design, flexible working time, remote work, cafeteria

remuneration systems (Moczulska, 2011). Employee direct participation has different qualities, i.e., the content (the issues involved), the scope (operational, tactical, strategic), the degree of formality (formal, informal – based on the freedom of participation), reality of influence (real, perceived – pseudo participation), stages of participation (full – when employees participate in all stages of the decision cycle, partial – only in selected stages and in any number of them), and intensity. From the last criterion, passive participation (co-operation) and active participation (co-decision) are distinguished. Co-operation is primarily based on informing and consulting employees about problems and their possible solutions. These are the so-called basic levels of participation (Błaszczyk, 1988) giving employees the right to information, hearing, speaking and advising. Co-decision, in turn, includes the right of employees to object, to consent, common dispute settlement and individual deciding. Thus, it constitutes their full participation in the decisions.

The model of using direct employee participation in the process of designing and implementing organizational changes is presented in Figure 1. The model assumes the participation of employees throughout the organizational changes process cycle from identifying their causes to control and monitoring of results (Ignyś, 2014). It includes both the participation of employees in the change team as well as direct individual and group participation in the process, reinforced using participatory methods and techniques of management. It also emphasizes the need for motivational change (internal – willingness, and external – opportunities created by the organization), together with the need for active involvement and support of the management for employees (Gobelna, Sidorkiewicz & Tokarz-Kocik, 2016), by choosing management style conducive to participation (Holland, Pyman, Cooper & Teicher, 2011; Gobelna & Marciszewska, 2016a). That is, participatory or consultative style (Moczulska, 2011; Szelałowska-Rudzka, 2015), showing open attitudes and ethical motivational behaviors (Czerska, 1996; Kizielewicz, 2015; Wolska & Kizielewicz), shaping mutual trust, teamwork (Wilkinson, Townsend & Burgess, 2013; Cierniak-Emerych, 2012), and employee involvement in the process (Chandani et al., 2016; Moczulska, 2011; Ignyś, 2014). It assumes occurring of the full spectrum of quality features of direct employee participation.

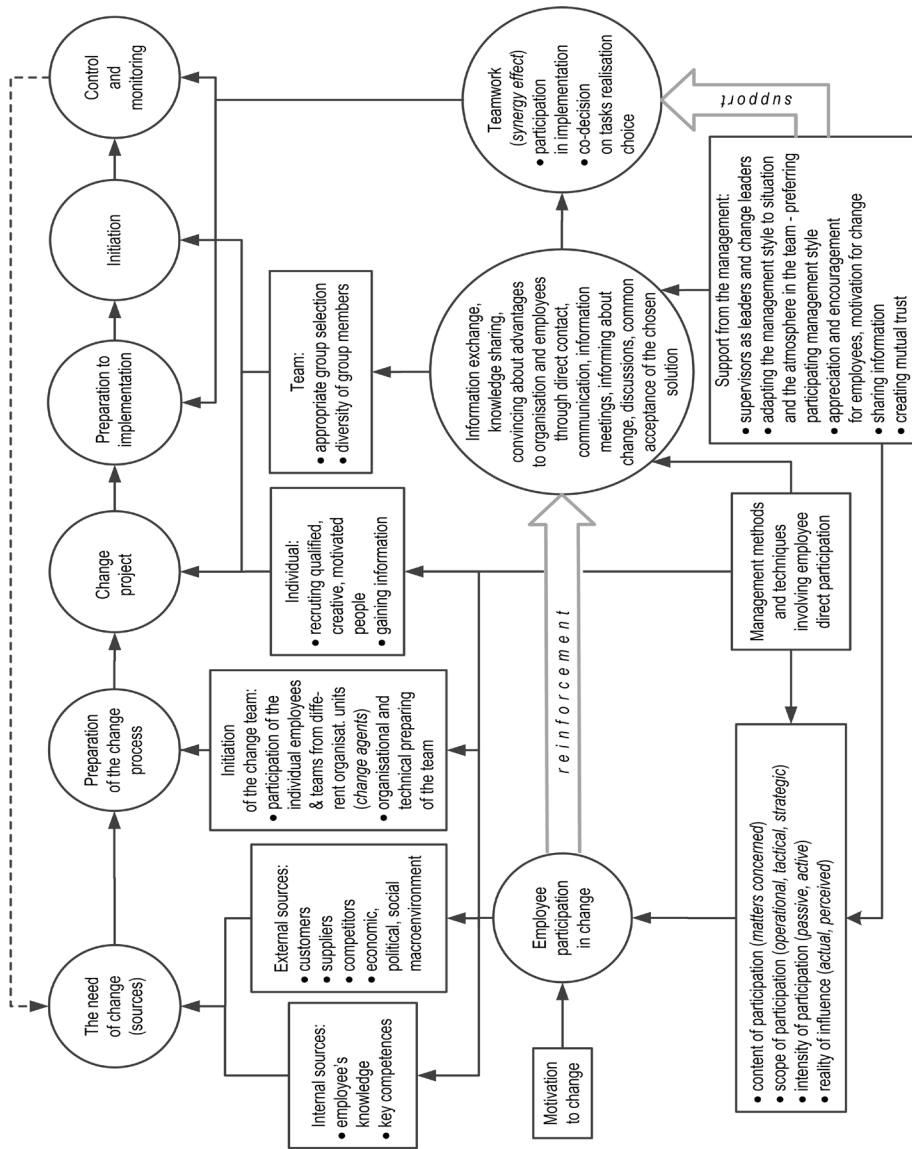


Figure 1. The model of employee participation in the organizational change process cycle

Source: based on Szlągowska-Rudzka (2017).

3. Research questions and methodology used

The aim of the article is the empirical verification of the employee participation model in the organizational change process cycle and the presentation and discussion of the results. To achieve this goal, the following research questions were formulated:

- 1) Do the employees of the surveyed organizations participate directly in the organizational change process?
- 2) What are the forms (group, individual), scope (operational, tactical, strategic), intensity (passive, active), and frequent use of direct participation of respondents in the change process?
- 3) What participatory management methods and techniques occur in the surveyed entities?
- 4) Do employees have the willingness and motivation to participate in the design and implementation of organizational changes?
- 5) To what extent do the management style of superiors and their attitudes and behaviors towards subordinates affect employee participation in the organizational change process cycle?
- 6) What employees' reactions to organizational changes are typical of the organizations surveyed and to what extent do they result from direct employee participation in the change design and implementation process?

To answer the questions mentioned above, the author has developed and conducted a pilot survey. The selection of the trial had a random character (Nowosielski, p. 5). The respondents – employees of Pomeranian organizations – were also part-time students of the Gdynia Maritime Academy (facilitation regarding the access to organizations). The survey was conducted by direct questionnaire method. The data were collected using a questionnaire survey of 10 questions and respondent's developed by the author and adjusted to the surveyed model. The questions in the survey related to the research questions and they concerned employee participation in organizational change process (its frequency, intensity, form), applied participatory management methods and techniques, managing style of superiors, their attitudes and behaviors towards subordinates, willingness (motivation) and possibilities of the employees to participate in the changes, their interest in the affairs of the organization and the reactions to these changes. The study allowed to verify the effectiveness and correctness of the questionnaire.

4. Characteristics and results of the research

The study was conducted in December 2016. It was attended by 197³ employees of organizations located in the Pomeranian Province. 90% of them are enterprises (including 73% private), 5% are municipalities, 3% non-governmental organizations (2% – other). 25% of the surveyed organizations employ less than ten people, 24% of them employ 10 to 49 people, 21% companies employ 50 to 249 people, as well as over 500 people, and 9% employ 250 to 500 people. 73% of respondents are between 20-30 years old (17% are 31-40 years old, 8% – over 40 years old and 2% under 20 years old), 66% are female, 34% are male. Most commonly they are employed in the executive position – 42%, or specialist position – 41%, less often managers – 13% (owners – 3%, other – 1%). Detailed results of the study are presented in Tables 1-10.

Table 1. Frequency of participation by the respondents at various stages of the process of designing and implementing organizational changes

Process stage	Frequency					
	Very often	Often	Neither often nor rarely	Rarely	Very rarely	Never
Recognition of the need for change implementation	16	34	20	14	5	11
Collecting information connected to the problem situation (need for change)	10	29	26	16	5	14
Search for possible solutions	15	34	19	14	6	12
Evaluation of the solutions	11	27	24	19	6	13
Choosing the ultimate solution	7	29	20	13	11	20
Preparation (organizational, technological, information) for change implementation – the chosen solution	13	23	27	11	9	17
Implementation / realization of the chosen solution	13	29	24	10	7	17

As shown in Table 1, 80% to 89% of respondents declare participation in different stages of the organizational change process. Employees most often participate in the first stage – identifying the need for change – 50% (very often and often responses), then searching possible solutions – 49%, and implementation of the chosen solution – 42%. They are least likely to participate in the evaluation of solutions – 49% (neither often nor rarely, rarely and very rarely), in gathering information related to the need for change and in preparation for implementation – 47% each (Table 1).

³ There were 212 people altogether, but 15 questionnaires were rejected due to incomplete answers.

Table 2. The actual way of participating in the various stages of the process of designing and implementing the organizational changes declared by the respondents

Process stage	Way of participation in the decision-making						
	Infor- ming	Abil- ity to speak	Advi- sing	Right to object	Common dispute settle- ment	Indivi- dual decid- ing	No join- ing in
Recognition of problem – the need for change	21	37	16	2	15	2	6
Collecting information connected to the problem situation	16	35	19	4	12	3	11
Search for solutions	10	28	28	3	17	4	10
Evaluation of the solutions	15	26	19	6	13	4	17
Choosing the ultimate solution	14	23	16	7	15	4	21
Preparation (organizational, technological, information) for change implementation – the chosen solution	13	23	18	5	18	2	20
Implementation / realization of the chosen solution	17	19	19	5	18	4	18

The contribution of passive participation (the total of the responses: informing, ability to speak, advising) is greater than active participation (total of the responses: right to object, common dispute settlement, individual deciding) (Table 2). At the same time, the contribution of co-decision (active) is increasing from the solution search stage (24% – the total of the options: ability to object, common dispute settlement, individual deciding) up to the stage of the chosen solution implementation (27%). However, the percentage of respondents who did not participate in the process is increasing from this stage (searching solutions) (response: no joining in) (Table 2).

Table 3. The form of employee participation in the process of designing and implementing organizational changes

Form of participation	Responses (%)
individual	16
group	49
both	35

Table 4. Participatory management methods and techniques used in the researched organizations

Methods/techniques	Responses (%) *
Problem solution teams	43
Management by objectives	42
Work enrichment and design	21
Quality circles	8
Kaizen	4
TQM	3
Flexible working hours	30
None	20

*More than one response was possible

Table 5. The way in which immediate supervisors usually make decisions

No.	Specification	Responses (%)
1	Individually	24
2	Seeking information from employees individually, without explaining the essence of the questions	11
3	Seeking information from employees individually, explaining the problem	31
4	Consulting the situation, the problem and the decision with a group of employees	23
5	Together with employees	11

49% of respondents declare team participation in the change process; another 35% declare both forms – team and individual (Table 3). The most commonly used management techniques are the group ones: team problem solving (43%), management by objectives (42%). Among the individual techniques, the most popular are: flexible working hours (30%) and work enrichment and design (21%) (Table 4).

A total of 54% of respondents states that their supervisor applies a consultative management style (the responses in lines 3 and 4, Table 5), and another 11% declare that the manager decides with the employees (democratic style) (line 5). The contribution of autocratic style – unfavorable to direct employee participation – equals 24% (line 1, Table 5).

Table 6. Attitudes and behaviors of the direct superior towards respondents

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Dis-agree	Strongly disagree
Sets direct expectations of employees	25	54	9	8	4
Acts in accordance with employees	13	49	19	13	5
Informs about work results	18	53	14	10	5
Follows advice, opinions in decision-making (incl. organizational change) realized tasks	9	46	26	13	6
Their help and support can be counted on in difficult situations	24	41	17	12	6
Cares for employees	19	37	28	11	5
Treats employees subjectively	16	38	26	14	6
Cares for employees' professional development	18	38	27	13	4
Is competent (possesses the knowledge, skills, competence) as manager	24	40	19	11	6
Is the leader who can win employees in the organizational change process	18	37	28	10	7

Table 7. Responses concerning the willingness and possibility to participate in the change and become involved in the affairs of the organization

Responses (%) Issues	Willingness		Possibility	
	yes	no	yes	no
to participate in organizational changes	75	25	54	46
to express own opinions and views concerning the position/ department	86	14	82	18
to express own opinions and views concerning the enterprise	72	28	65	35
to suggest ideas concerning the position / department	84	16	78	22
to suggest ideas concerning the enterprise	65	35	56	44
to express concern	84	16	82	18
to share one's professional experience	80	20	86	14
gaining information about what is happening in the organization	78	22	68	32

The vast majority of employees are of the opinion that their manager sets clear goals – 79% (the total of the responses: strongly agree, agree), informs about work results – 71%, in the difficult situation their help and support can be counted on – 65%, he or she is competent as manager – 64% and works in agreement with employees – 62% (Table 6). Relatively the largest number of negative responses concerned the options: treats employees subjectively (46%: disagree, strongly disagree, no opinion), follows their advice and

opinions (45%), is the leader (45%), cares about employees (44%) and their professional development (44%) (Table 6).

75% of respondents declare their willingness to participate in organizational changes, but only 54% confirm that the organization gives them opportunities (table 7). Employees are most motivated to express opinions (86%) and suggest ideas (84%) concerning their work position or department and to raise their concerns in various cases (84%). They are less willing to comment on and submit ideas concerning the whole company (72% and 65% respectively). Knowledge sharing is the only case in which the opportunities offered by the organization (86%) outweigh the motivation of employees (80%).

Employees are also willing (78%) and able (68%) to gain information about what is happening in their organization (Table 7). Most often, this information comes from their observations (82%), from co-workers (60%), direct supervisors (49%), and meetings with company authorities (31%) (Table 8).

Table 8. Sources of respondents' information about their organization's situation

Source of information	Responses (%) *
own observation	82
customers	27
suppliers	9
immediate supervisor	49
meetings with company authorities	31
co-workers	60
gossip	21
media (e.g., papers)	7
no access to information	1

*More than one response was possible

Table 9. The extent to which respondents care about the success (development, prosperity) of their organization

Very big	Big	Average	Small	Very small	None
29%	44%	18%	5%	1,5%	2,5%

73% of the respondents are concerned about the success (development and prosperity) of their organization, including 29% of them to a very big extent. Only 9% of the employees respond negatively to this issue (responses: small, very small, none) (Table 9).

Table 10. Attitudes and behavior of respondents towards organizational changes

Specification	Responses (%)
Indifferent	18
I only get involved when it is beneficial for me	27
I always engage in changes	51
I resist changes because:	4 *
I have no information about them	1
I do not know the reasons for implementation	1
I am afraid they will be unfavorable for me	1
I do not trust the management and their change design	2
I was not invited to participate in change	0
I have had previous experience concerning change implementation in my organization	2

*More than one response concerning the resistance towards change was possible, so the partial responses do not sum up to 4%.

As shown in Table 10, most respondents – 51% are always involved in changes, the next 27% are also involved, but only when it is favorable for them, whereas 18% are indifferent. Only 4% of respondents declare resistance to organizational changes.

5. Conclusions and discussion

According to the study:

- vast majority of the surveyed employees of Pomeranian enterprises participate directly in the process of organizational change (real participation) at all stages (full participation);
- this participation is more likely to be co-operation (passive) than co-deciding (active) and manifests itself in informing employees, giving them the opportunity to speak and advise;
- concerns primarily the affairs of the work position or department (operational, tactical); to a smaller degree of the whole organization (strategic);
- employees have access to information about organization and the change process;
- they also have the conditions for participation created by the organization and the willingness (motivation) to participate in the change; they are concerned with the success (development and prosperity) of their organization;

- employees participate mainly in teams, as well as both in teams and individually, group and individual participatory techniques are applied to them;
- supervisors most commonly use consultative management style conducive to direct participation, show attitudes and behaviors that support employees in participating in the change process cycle;
- employees, on the other hand, manifest desirable attitudes towards organizational changes, i.e., engage in changes, do not resist them.

The conclusions mentioned above provide positive answers to the research questions. They point out that direct employee participation in the surveyed organizations positively influences the course of the organizational change process cycle and employee responses to change. Thus, it can be concluded that the proposed theoretical model of employee participation in the cycle of the organizational change process is effective and applicable in organizational practice, and the developed questionnaire has fulfilled its role by providing the necessary empirical data.

However, the study presented is a pilot study, and the conclusions concern only the subjects involved. Purposeful and occasional trial selection – the respondents were part-time students – facilitated the access to the surveyed organizations and conducting the study – but resulted in relatively optimistic results. The author is unable to determine whether, during the survey, the organizations underwent an organizational change or whether the respondents referred to the events (and their participation) from the past, or what the subject, scope and nature of the changes were.

The second study carried out by the author in March 2017, based on the same model, brought different results. It was carried out at one of the faculties of a Tri-city public university undergoing reorganization (change in the number of departments) whose determinants (subject, scope, determinants) were known. The analysis of the opinions of the surveyed faculty members (79% of the total number of academic teachers) indicated the presence of passive participation (informing), the autocratic style of faculty authorities (change designers) (53%) and the attitude of indifference (31%) and employee resistance (30%) to implemented transformations. Only 23% of respondents declared engagement into change. It was found that the course of the process and employees' reactions to change were significantly influenced by internal determinants (related mainly to employment conditions) and by the fact that the employees were involved in the process too late (Szelałowska-Rudzka, 2017).

The results of the study by Lines (2004) indicate a strong negative correlation between employee direct participation and resistance in the process of implementing a strategic change in a national telecommunications company.

The same study has also provided evidence of strong positive relationships between employee participation and achievement of the goal (the strategic change implementation) together with organizational commitment, which, according to Lines (2004), is determined by the accordance of participation with the company's organizational culture and personal goals. Another survey carried out by Miller, Johnson and Grau (1994) drew attention to the lack of negative reactions to organizational changes in the surveyed insurance company due to full access of employees to „high quality” information about the change.

The results of other analyses presented in the source literature indicate positive associations of direct employee participation in organizational change processes with their effects. For example, the study by Bordia and co-workers (Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois & Callan, 2004) in public sector organizations demonstrated that employee participation in the decision-making process and employees' possibility to speak reduces uncertainty about the effects of change and increases control over its course. Morgan and Zeffane (2003), on the example of the different types of Australian companies, stressed the key role and importance of trust in management and the ability to fully consult with the superiors at the highest level in the change process. Allen, Jimmieson, Bordia, and Irmer (2007), from interviews with representatives of various organizations, found that effective internal communication realized through various sources positively influences the change. Coyle-Shapiro (1999) describes the good impact of employee participation and involvement by the implementation of TQM in a UK manufacturing company.

Scott-Ladd and Chan (2004) underline the positive effects of direct employee participation in improving the organization's ability to manage the change. Iverson (1996) and O'Brien (2002) in assuring change acceptance, also influenced by the choice of the proper management style (O'Brien, 2002).

According to the research presented above, direct employee participation in the process of organizational change in entities of different types, of different sizes, operating in different industries, countries and conditions, brings positive effects and is applied in organizational practice. It can be concluded that the author's model of employee participation in the cycle of the organizational change process, taking into account the aspects of the various sub-studies proposed by the authors referred to, is a response to the organization's needs. It can contribute to the desired employee reactions to organizational changes, to transform them into change allies, collaborating and involved in the process of its design and implementation. It is important that direct employee participation in decision-making is real, that employees are involved in the change process cycle from the first to the last stage and have full access to information. Then they will understand why the changes

are needed, what the reasons for them are, why they run in a certain way, and how they can best be implemented. They will accept the solutions in the choice of which they will participate. They will consider them their own and will not resist them.

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