Adherence to Change: an Empirical Study in Brazilian Federal Agency

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Abstract

The objective of this article was to identify empirically the influence of adherence to change on perceived results, considering the moderating role of organizational structure components, in Administrative Council for Economic Defense - Cade. Study 1 described the change process Cade went through and enabled operationalization of adherence to change and perceived results for the empirical testing of proposed relations in Study 2; Study 3 sought to incorporate a collective vision of the participants of the focus group conducted. Quantitative results were analyzed in 12 reduced empirical models and 1 global empirical model, indicating that adherence to the change was positively related with results perceived in several reduced empirical models, but with low explanatory power; the same happened regarding moderation test. No conclusions were reached about demographic and professional variables behavior. Study 3 showed ambivalent and positive reactions to change and the emergence of context factors that can contribute to adherence to the change. The main theoretical contributions of this work are the empirical test of the hypothesized relationships in literature and the operationalization of the construct for research, seeking to advance theoretical consolidation of the area.

Keywords: organizational change, reactions to change, adherence to change, attitudes.

Introduction

Organizational change is a recurring theme in organizational studies (Sorge & Van Witteloostuijn, 2011). The most traditional approach to individual reaction to change is resistance to change, and is considered the main factor for failure (Hernandez & Caldas, 2001), leading to three results: (i) ignorance of the complex nature of reactions to change (and not all of them are negative); (ii) define resistance as something negative, even tough this process may be a defense mechanism towards harmfull change; (iii) mask other problems which may have lead the project to failure (Weiner, 2009). This approach has been contested by more contemporary approachs, which regonizes the multiplicity of reactions to change (Piderit, 2000) and the intricate nature of the relations between variables. However, empirical testing of these relations is lacking (Barends, Janssen, ten Have & ten Have, 2014).

The inspiring phenomenon for this work is the organizational change process in the Administrative Council for Economic Defense (Cade), a federal agency connected to the Ministry of Justice. In 2012, Cade underwent a major organizational structure and competency change: it absorbed competencies regarding persecution of antitrust infractions (former responsibility of the Secretariat for Economic Defense, which was a part of the Ministry of

Justice) and the analysis of Mergers and Acquisitions (former responsibility of the Secretariat for Economic Monitoring, which is a part of the Ministry of Finance), new workflows were designed, and a new organizational culture arose. The process was considered a huge success, having been awarded both nationally and internationally, and the main success factor identified by Cade's leadership was staff commitment, revealing a different scenario from the one portrayed by academic production. Therefore, the objective of this work was to study a specific organizational change process, in order to investigate the empirical relationships between adherence to change and perceived change by the individuals, considering the moderation role of structure in this relationship. The theoretical relevance of this work rests on the perception that current empirical works are mostly based on the negative reaction spectrum, even though the plurality of reactions is acknowledged (Neiva & Paz, 2012; Avey, Wernsing & Luthans, 2008; Vakola et al, 2013).

Organizational change theoretical background

Neiva and Paz (2007) argue that little is known about organizational change, and one of the difficulties is the concept of change, for there are several aspects considered, such as scope, depth, reaction time, typhology and content (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Therefore, there is theoretical dispersion, which creates the diversity of themes approached. Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) researched organizational change literature in the 1990s. The authors identified diverse conceptual defitions and approaches to the phenomena, with four main lines of research: (i) organizational change diagnostics; (ii) context variables which lead to change, and how organizations responded; (iii) change management processes, and (iv) independent variables (such as resistance, commitment, cinism) which altered the results expected in (iii) in therms of organizational efficiency.

A different approach to organizational change is of change as a process (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Van de Ven & Poole, 2005). Tsoukas and Chia (2002) refute the proposition of change as an exception: for life in organizations is about change, and the statics moments are the occasions when individuals realign their beliefs and perceptions with the new reality. Procedural approaches to change and the importance of change perception calls for attention to individuals participation, shedding light on the micro (individual) level of analisys (Neiva & Pantoja, 2011).

How do individuals react to change?

Oreg, Vakola and Armenakis (2011) researched 60 years of quantitative studies regarding organizational change (in a total of 79 articles). Their main findings were: (i) not all studies used the three attitudinal components, but rather employed different combinations; (ii) on the affective dimension, most studies focused on negative emotions; and (iii) behavioral component appeared both as actual behavior and as intended behavior. In methodological terms, most studies are transversal and base on self-reports. In regard to the empirical relations among variables, several antecedents of attitudes were researched, such as pre-change (internal context and participants' characteristics), process, content and perceived benefits. The combination of the force and valence of each dimension will determine whether there is resistance, adherence/acceptance or ambivalence.

As an example of studies regarding positives reaction to change, Rafferty, Jimmieson and Armenakis (2013) reviewed the literature on readiness for change. The authors depart from a

concern regarding successful implementation of organizational change, and how employees disposition can affect this outcome. Readiness to change, for Rafferty et al (2013), is the most prelavent positive attitude towards change in the literature, and two gaps were mapped: (i) empashys on the cognitive aspect, and lack of research on affective ones, and (ii) lack of employement of a multilevel approach, rather focused on the individual level. For the authors, the results expected from readiness to change occur on two levels: on the individual level, they would be active support behaviors to change, leading to organizational commitment; on the organizational level, the expression would be the development of capacity to change, and would emanate from the shared cognitions and affects of individuals in the same unit.

The role of organizational structure

Organizatioan structure appears in organizational change research as features altered by change, specially formal structure (Hannan, Pólos & Carroll, 2003) or context factors, such as communication and group authonomy (Domingos & Neiva, 2014; Kim, Hornung & Rousseau, 2011). Rafferty and Restubog (2010) investigate the role of formal (lectures) and informal (interactions among managers and employees) communication, measured as employee's perceived communication quality, and previous experiences on affective commitment and turnover. Authors found that (i) good quality communication related positively to affective commitment; (ii) previous negative experiences generated low affective commitment; and (iii) affective commitment related positively with work satisfaction and negatively with turnover. Voet (2014) researched the moderating role of organizational structure in the form of a bureaucreatic structure, defined in levels of decision making centralization, task formatlization, and excessive attachment to rules (red tape). Results showed that, in high level bureaucreatic units, planned change relates positively to individual disposition to change. From the literature, it is possible to conclude that organizational structure contributes to understanding individuals and group interactions, and how these translate in support/resistance to change.

Summary of the theoretical model and variables researched

This study is based on the theoretical proposition that individuals may express diverse attitudes towards change, and that positive attitudes towards change may be, in fact, the first reaction to change. Moreover, positive attitudes may influence the success of organizational change, and that structure components may moderate this relationship. The theoretical model developed has three hypotheses:

H1: adherence to change is positively related with the effective results perceived by the individuals of the organization;

H2: Organizational structure components will influence the relationship between adherence to change and effective results perceived;

An additional hypothesis regards possible differences between groups on the formation of adherence to change. Hypothesis 3 is that there will be statistically significant differences between groups from core and support areas on the formation of adherence to change, and that the core area group will show greater adherence to change. Personal and professional variables were also investigated, but no specific hypothesis were drawn.

Method

In 2012, Cade underwent a major reform, with the edition of Bill n. 12.529 (2011). Before, Cade was responsible for judging the administrative processes that the Secretariat for Economic Defense (which was a part of the Ministry of Justice) the Secretariat for Economic Monitoring (which is a part of the Ministry of Finance) started, regarding persecution of antitrust infractions and the analysis of Mergers and Acquisitions. With the new bill, these competencies were transferred to Cade, which culminated in the creation of a new organizational unit, the General Superintendence. The bill also determined a change in the merger and acquisitions workflow: now, Cade had to analyze mergers before they started. A new structure was also created in the bill of law. Cade had 6 months to prepare for all the changes required. In order to succeed, Cade's leadership organized six working groups (some of which began working once the possibility of the ediction of the bill of law became a reality), which addressed the new organizational structure, a new headquarter, a new team (with civil servants coming from the former Secretariats) and new internal procedures and regulations. On may 2012, Cade began to work with the new structure, and the whole process was considered a success, regarding Cade's core work.

Study 1

Study one consisted of a qualitative and descriptive phase, in order to create the scales used to measure variables Perceived Results and Adherence to Change. The population consisted of the heads of the six work groups created, along with Cade's President (former Secretary of Economic Defense) and General Superintendent (responsible for creating the new mergers and acquisitions workflow). Sample is Cade's President and Superintendent, the former Head of Logistics and Head of President Staff.

Data collection procedures consisted of documental research (internal documents on the change process, official reports from 2012 and Cade's internal website) and semi-structured interviews (Godoi & Mattos, 2010). The interviews had two main objetives: map the expected outcomes of the process and to acess possible perceptions of employee's reaction to change. Data analysis strategy consisted of content analysis (Bardin, 2011).

Study 2

Study two consisted of the statistical testing of the hipothesys presented, with data collected through a questionnaire based on three scales: (i) Adherence to Change, created to this specific research and based on the constructs mapped; (ii) Perceived Results, created to this specific research; and (iii) Structure Components, an instrument created by Coelho Jr., Quadros, Oliveira and Maciel (no date), validation pending.

Population consisted of civil servants and employees allocated in the core and support areas (and also former employees who participated in the process), which accounted for 250 people at the time; the sample of this study was of 177 employees (N=177). The minimum sample size required for data analysis (using logistic regression) was of 100 observations (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2009), based on the number of categories of the dependent variable. For the validation of the scales created, 150 observations were needed (Pasquali, 2005). In order to meet the minimum of observations required, the strategy was to run a census.

From the final sample, 89,83% (159) currently work at Cade, e 10,17% are former employees. The sample is evenly distributed between men (48,6%) and women (50,3%), and 61,72% are at most 34 years old. Almost half are graduates (88 - 49,7%), and 70 (39,5%) are post-graduates students. Only 12,4% haven't finished high school. On their professional profile,

19,2% hold positions of free appointment and exonerations, 24,3% are effective civil servants, and 32,7% are outsorced employees. In terms of time of service, 31,6% of the employees have less than 2,5 years at Cade (meaning they didn't participate in the organitinal change); 25,4% work in support areas, and 32,8% occupy leadership positions.

There were 31 outliers identified using mahalanobis distance. They were profiled in order to decide wether they would be kept, and their most distinguinshing feature was that only 12% were in leadership positions (against 32,8% in the whole sample), and had a lower score on Adherence to Change measure. This finding may indicate a certain amount of distance of these individuals from the change process. They were kept, and their profile was used to define focus group participants in study 3.

Study 3

Study 3 consisted of a focus group. Participants were chosen by convenience: 10 employees were invited, based on their possible outlier profile – change participants without leadership positions. Six employees participated, five from support area, and five were women. Only one of the participants now occupy a leadership position. Data colletion was based on the same script used in study 1, in order to compare the results obtained, specially regarding perception congruence of planned results.

Results and Discussion

In Study 1, the results were aggregated in order to emphasize convergenve/divergence among answers. They were divided in the following topics: (1) Perceived and expected changes: all subjects reported as a main expected result Cade's capacity building in order to operate under a new framework (the new bill of law). More specific changes were: new headquarters, new team, new merger analysis workflow and a hole new organizational structure, which strenghned Cade's support area and enabled function segregation. Two subjects related a greater distance between people and units in this new structure; Although there was no specific method employed, there was structure and planning to the change, with clear goals and a timeline, the main evidence being the creation of the six work-groups; (2) hindering factors were general resource lack (budget and human resource and a fragmented governance model, with three agencies deciding all steps. The main enabling factor was employees' commitment to making the project work, and; (3) The main reactions described were of commitment and excitement over the changeand the perception that the best people were ahead of the change. One subject mentioned the anxiety in Sde's team, which was kept affar from the process. Chart 1 resumes the findings in 12 perceiveds results, as bellow:

Chart 1: Perceived results scale

| Perceived | Content | Frequency (%) |
|-----------|---|---------------|
| Result | | (valid cases) |
| Result 1 | Cade has, since may 2012, new work processes in its core area. | Yes = 96% |
| | | No = 4% |
| Result 2 | Cade has, since may 2012, new work processes in its support area. | Yes = 93,1% |
| | | No = 6.9% |
| Result 3 | Cade has, since may 2012, a new merger procedure analysis. Now, companies must | Yes = 96,6% |
| | inform the intent before closing the deal. | No = 3,4% |
| Result 4 | Procedural deadlines have changed after may 2012, and the average analysis time for | Yes = 99,4% |
| | a merger procedure has diminished. | No = 0.6% |

| - | | | | |
|-----------|--|-------------|--|--|
| Result 5 | Procedural deadlines have changed after may 2012, and the average analysis time for | | | |
| | a punitive procedure has diminished. | | | |
| Result 6 | alt 6 Cade has a new organizational structure. This new structure has change | | | |
| | responsibilities and demands of the areas where I work. | No = 14,2% | | |
| Result 7 | sult 7 Cade has a new organizational structure. This new structure has demanded change o | | | |
| | work processes of Cade's units. | No = 6.8% | | |
| Result 8 | The incorporation of new competencies and work process in the core areas had | Yes = 96,6% | | |
| | repercussions on support areas. | No = 3,4% | | |
| Result 9 | Support areas have new responsibilities and work processes due to the changes in the | Yes = 91,4% | | |
| | core areas. | No = 8,6% | | |
| Result 10 | Cade's new organizational structure has enabled the improvement of organizational | Yes = 96% | | |
| | results. | No = 4% | | |
| Result11 | People have less disposition to cooperate towards joint solutions nowadays. | Yes = 13% | | |
| | | No = 87% | | |
| Result12 | Cade's units are farther apart now than before the change in may 2012. | Yes = 45,8% | | |
| | | No = 54,2% | | |

Study 2 consisted of hipothesys testing through stepwise (exploratory) logist regression (H1), moderation relations (H2) and non-parametric tests (H3). Explorative analysis showed that linear data was not normal. Missing values were also evaluated, and after exclusion of observations with whole scales unfulfilled (and who were non participants of the change process), no patterns were discernable (initial N=186, final N=177). Next step was data reduction through factor analisys of linear data, in order to proceed to hipotesis testing.

Scales used in Study 2

Perceived results scale consisted of 12 affirmations about the intended results in the eyes of Cade's leadership, such as a perceived decrease in the instruction time of administrative processes). Respondents had to mark Yes for perceived results, and No for not perceived results, related in Chart 1. Structure components were assessed through an specific scale created by Coelho Jr., Quadros, Oliveira and Maciel (no date), consisting of 38 itens with a likewise 10 point Likert scale, where 1 was "completely disagree", and 10 was "completely agree". Adherence to change scale consisted of 17 itens created to measure positive cognitions (what was known about the change), affects (how people felt towards the change) and behavior (adapted from Voet, 2014) at the time. The scale was formatted as a likewise 10 point Likert scale, where 1 was "completely disagree", and 10 was "completely agree".

Hipotheses testing in study 2

After data reduction procedures, logistic regression was run using each perceived result as a variable in a model, for hipotheses 1 and 2. In order to obtain a global model, a summary variable was created by distributing the number of perceived results per observation in a frequency scale, decoded in a new dichotomic variable. Those subjects with a low results perception (first and second quartilhes) were rotulated as Low, and those with high perceptions (third and four quartilhes) were rotulated as high. H1 testing consisted of comparing chi-square statistics in two models: one without the predictors and one with the predictors, if they have a significant Wald statistatics (also known as odd ratio, being the probability of belonging to a certain group), similar to R coefficient in linear regression. If there is a significantly change in the statistics, there is evidence of a causal relation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Nagelkerke's R² (also known as *pseud R*) represents the total variance explained by the model. In order to test hiphotesys 2, moderation as defined by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) was verified between

variables Adherence to Change and Perceived Results with Organizational Structure Components, with impact on Wald statistics (W).

In the first step, only the variable Adherence to Change was introduced, with 6 of the 13 models producing statistically significant results. Second step was the introduction of professional and personal variables, and change participation, but with low explanatory results. Third step was the verification of moderation effects with the introduction of organizational structure factors, with evidence of moderation in 5 models with varied results, but mostly with lessening of Adherence to Change's predictive power (indicative of shared variance). Personal and professional variables assumed a moderating role as well in this step, and Adherence to Change assumed a moderating role in model 12, indicating more complex relationship among variables. Table 1 summarizes the finds of H1 and H2, highlight the statistically significant variables (p<0,005), with Exp (B) between brackets.

Table1: Summary of results found in all models

| Dependent variable | Step 1 – adherence to change | Step 2 – new variables | Step 3 - moderation |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|---|--|
| Result 1 | Adherence to change (2,12) | Adherence to change (2,097) ³ | Non significant |
| Result 2 | Adherence to change (1,56) | Adherence to change $(1,53)^3$ | Adherence to changeX Communication System and Perception of Formal Aspects (1,044) 2,3 |
| Result 3 | Non significant | Non significant | Non significant |
| Result 4 | Non significant | Non significant | Non significant |
| Result 5 | Non significant | Non significant | Non significant |
| Result 6 | Adherence to change (1,487) | Change participation (3,48) ^{2,3} Communication System and Perception of Formal Aspects(1,556) | Non significant |
| Result 7 | Non significant | Non significant | Non significant |
| Result8 | Non significant | Non significant | Non significant |
| Result9 | Adherence to change (1,811) | Adherence to change (1,79) 3, 4 | Non significant |
| Result 10 | Não houve significância | Communication systems (2,144) | Adherence to change X leadership and team perception (0,957) ⁴ |
| Result 11 | Adherence to change (0,627) | Adherence to change (0,591) ² , ³ | Gender X Adherence to change (0,845) Adherence to change X leadership and team perception (0,960) ² |
| Result 12 | Não houve significância | Gender (3,24) Years of service (10 years and more) (7,51) Position in the organization Change participation (0.269) | Position in the organization X Adherence to change (0,986) Gender X Adherence to change (0,878) |
| Global model | Adherence to change (1,267) | Leadership role (4,495) ² Change participation (3,658) ² | Non significant |

Notes: ¹Increase in [Exp(B)]; ²Increase in Nagelkerke)R²; ³Decrease in [Exp(B)]; ⁴Decrease in Nagelkerke)R².

Source: created by authors

H3 consisted of comparing core and support areas employees, change participation and leadership role regarding adherence to change through Mann-Whitney tests. There were stastistically significant differences between those who participated in the change process

(p=0,023), with an average of 7,8 against 7,3, and those with leadership positions in Cade (p=0,000), with an average of 8,35 against 7,31. These findings are supported theoretically and empirically (Oreg et at, 2011), and constitute an important research agenda.

Adherence to Change was found as statistically significant in predicting Perceived Results when inserted by itself; when other variables were inserted, the relations became more complex. The effect found was low (3%), which may have been caused by the low variation of the dependent variable. Therefore, it is not possible to reject H1.

Two variables appeared in step two: gender and change participation. There were no clear explanations for gender (Oreg et atl, 2011; Vakola, Armenakis, & Oreg, 2013). Change participation emerged as a contex variable; its interaction with leadership role, and the results obtained in H3, may indicate a important role of this variables. In high adherence context, individual engagement (specially those in leadership positions) may hold great explanatory power, revealing also complex interactions among variables from different levels. This proposal finds theoretical background on Valoka, Armenakis and Oreg (2013), on Bisel and Barge (2010), and empirical background in Buchanan, Addicott, Fitzgeral, Ferlie and Baesa (2007).

Regarding H2, there was no clear moderation role found, which may come from the understanding of organizational structure as context variables and, therefore, shares variance with Adherence to Change. It is important to notice that moderation relationship such as the one proposed in H2 havent been researched, and may constitute an important research agenda. H3 was refuted, but other relations were found, as described above.

In Study 3, the main changes reported were the increase in the organizational structure, the distancing between individuals and areas (for there are less opportunities to interact now). A second set of changes perceived was the overall diminishing of average analysis time in core work processes. Regarding support areas, it was related a general sense of a workload increase, eventough some processes remained the same. When questioned about planning aspects, the group associated it with the new headquarter. The general sense was of caos and little time invested, and also of lack of proper work conditions.

As enabling/hindering factors, the participantes quoted the intensive communication as a enabling factor, but with limited results, since the changes focused were in the core area, and support area employees felt adrifit; as hindering factors, budget and human resource limitations. Regarding expected results, a general sense of hope of Cade's growth and autonomy, and professional opportunites for Cade's current employees emerged; this last expectation was frustrated. When questioned about the reactions verified, all mentioned a positive reaction, since the changes were desired; there was also a sense of cooperation and commitment, althought some people were more ambivalent, nor resisting nor contributing actively. Two organizational factors appeared as important as well: (i) strong communication system and (ii) informal leaders influence, pointing to more complex contribution of structure components than moderation.

Study 3 helped support the existence of Adherence to Change in Cade's workforce, shown in support behaviors throughout the change, but also ambivalent and passive resistance. This may indicate the importance of context variables in a high adherence to change environment, and of the social cognitive processes involved (for participation and communication were found important both in study 1 and 3). Other variables arose, such as organizational culture and the importance of change agents to the process as a whole.

Closing remarks

The present article sought to understand the relationship between adherence to change and perceived results of an organizational change process. Organizational structure was included, for it perparsses all relations between individuals and organizations. Beyond the hipotheses proposed, the research helped bring forth some variables (such as context, communication, organizational culture) that contributed to Cade's organizational change process. It was noticed that not all attitudes were of support to change, that unplanned results may arise, and are not always positive. There is a strong subjective element, and participation in the decision makind process may make adherence to change flourish.

There are some limitations for this study: the first (and strongest) is that this article is about a specific change process, and has to balance between depth and generalization – in fact, this is one of the main challenges of organizational change research. A second one is the research design, which was transversall (ideally, it would be longitudinal). A third one is the existence of self-report bias, and the last one is the low variability of the criteria variable.

As research recommendation, the first suggestion is Adherence to Change scale application in other studies and replication of the research model. The second is the importance of context and personal variables, such as the role change agents may play on successful interventions. A third suggestion is the employment of multilevel research model, in order to investigate the relashionship among variables from different levels. A final suggestion is the creation of a negative attitude towards change scale, in order to contrast with the proposed scale in this study.

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