

# EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS IN RESISTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ORGANISATIONAL INNOVATION

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## ABSTRACT

Business innovation faces a number of challenges. There is a certain paradox here. On the one hand, at the social level technological innovation is willingly accepted in everyday life. On the other hand, however, the implementation of innovation at the workplace leads to employee dissatisfaction (and even resistance) and is accepted with difficulty. Given these facts, the aim of the research is to identify the patterns of employee behaviour in resisting the implementation of organisational innovation. The review of scientific literature highlights the main forms of employees' resistance to innovation, i.e. active / passive, open / secret. Research based on questionnaires carried out in nine public transport companies revealed that the majority of employees, although resisting change, behave passively and in a neutral manner; they take neither open / active nor secret actions.

## KEY WORDS

Innovation, employees' resistance.

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## Introduction

Business innovation faces a number of challenges, such as fundraising, sufficiency of equipment and infrastructure, training existing employees, recruitment, training and further maintenance of the appropriate people, planning of employee- and supplier servicing, expansion and migration via new channels of communication. The peculiarity of business innovation lies in the fact that, at the social level, technological innovation is willingly accepted in everyday life, but the implementation of innovation at the workplace leads to employee dissatisfaction and is accepted with difficulty.

A number of scholars point out that employees' resistance to change is one of the

most common causes of failure to implement innovation (Zwick, 2002; Berna-Martinez and Macia-Perez, 2012; Mansor et al., 2013; Rašticová et al., 2019). Approximately 70% of organisations failed to implement change programmes due to employees' resistance to changes (Mansor et al., 2013). At the time of implementing innovation in the organisation, instead of focusing mainly on technical elements, it is also important for managers to assess human elements of change (Bovey and Hede, 2001; Kliestikova and Kovacova, 2017). Scholars unanimously recognise that reducing resistance to changes is a crucial or critical stage of the process of change in organisa-

tions (Mariana et al., 2013; Kubíčková et al., 2018; Androniceanu, 2019). The problems of identification of the patterns of employee behaviour in resisting the process of innovation implementation in the organisation, as well as the assessment of peculiarities of such behaviour, taking into account the socio-demographic characteristics, are relevant to organisations pursuing the successful planning and implementation of innovation.

Given the facts presented, the aim of the paper is to find out what forms of behavioural expression are typical of the employees who resist innovation implementation in the organisation. A questionnaire survey was carried out in nine companies providing public transport passenger transportation services which had recently undergone an intense process of innovation implementation. The survey showed that the majority of employees, although disapproving of innovation implementation, behave passively and in a neutral manner, and they take neither open / active nor secret actions. For thorough analysis, respondents of different socio-demographic characteristics have been differentiated (Borocki et al., 2019). The research findings can help organisations to better understand the behaviour of employees during the process of innovation implementation, taking into account the employees' socio-demographic characteristics.

Management of the process of resistance to innovation can be successful only if the very process – the resistance of employees and how it is expressed through the employees' actions – is properly understood. These questions and their answers can lead to further scientific investigation of the causes of the process as well as means of overcoming them.

The paper consists of a theoretical section and a methodological–analytical section. The theoretical part briefly defines the

concept of innovation implementation as the process of controlled change as well as the concept and forms of employees' resistance to these changes. The methodological–analytical part provides the results of quantitative research – a questionnaire survey of employees working in companies of the Klaipėda municipal public transport system.

## 1. Theoretical background

Innovation is defined as ideas, systems, technologies, products, processes, services or policies that are new to the adopting unit (Sawang and Unsworth, 2011). Innovation is seen as a complex process by means of which, by applying new successfully developed and adapted technologies, a new product is launched to the market or improvements to the existing product, service or process are made (Sapiegienė et al., 2009). The definitive definition of the concept of innovation requires a tangible result that can generate economic benefit (Pukelienė et al., 2010; Sawang and Unsworth, 2011; Dabija et al., 2017).

The process of innovation implementation is a manageable and pre-planned change. The process of change in each organisation is unique due to the nature of organisational and commercial activities, work culture and values, leadership style, and the behaviour and attitudes of employees. Change is defined as a shift between the present and future situations or as a reaction in the event of something significant, or as an opportunity that emerges outside the organisation (Mansor et al., 2013). Change involves technical and social aspects. The technical aspect of change means that the physical work routine is undergoing changes. The social aspect of change shows how it will affect the relationships that have formed in the organisation (Lawrence, 2009; Gogolova and Majerova, 2013).

In summary, innovation is a complex process by means of which, by applying new successfully developed and adapted technologies, a new product is launched to the market or improvements to the existing product, service or process are made; this provides a tangible result that generates economic benefit (Androniceanu et al., 2019). Innovation activity is the process of change that is planned, run and implemented in innovative companies and organisations, and which involves generating, developing and realising ideas.

Innovation and its implementation in the organisation bring about a multitude of different changes in each organisation which implements innovation. The implementation of innovation in the organisation changes the relationships between shareholders and the company, the measures used at work, the nature of work, the workload, or creates new tasks, changes the hierarchy of employees or the organisational structure, etc. Therefore, the most common reaction which causes the most negative impact on innovation and its implementation in the company is employee resistance.

No changes occur in a vacuum; they take place in a well-defined and established, acceptable and even respectable context (Jager, 2001). There are two fundamental contradictions that arise inside the organisation – the need for stability and the need for creativity. On the one hand, companies need stability and a daily routine to perform everyday tasks quickly and efficiently. On the other hand, companies need to develop new ideas and new products to be competitive in the future (Trott, 2005).

Resistance is most commonly defined as a process rather than an event (Van Dijk and Van Dick, 2009). Generally, resistance to change is defined as a hidden or open expression of negative reactions, prevention of planned changes or constrain-

ing forces that resist the reorganisation of managers and the acquisition of new competencies. Since the changes brought about by innovation are very diverse and unfamiliar to employees, they can cause negative feelings and anxiety, annoyance, fear, hostility, intrigue, disunity, conflicts and intolerance among employees (Berna-Martinez and Macia-Perez, 2012). Resistance to organisational changes is defined as a form of disapproval of the process of change (a series of activities), which is considered by an individual as unpleasant, inconvenient or burdensome due to personal or group judgements (Giangreco and Pccci, 2005).

Resistance to change has long been recognised as a crucial factor which may influence the success or failure of the efforts to implement changes in the organisation (Mansor et al. 2013). While external and internal pressures continue to enhance changes, resistance is the factor that can balance these needs, bearing in mind the need for stability and steadiness. Resistance plays a crucial role in drawing attention to aspects of change that may be inappropriate, not well thought through, or perhaps plain wrong (Waddell and Sohal, 1998).

It should be noted that scholars see change not only as a threat, but also a positive opportunity. Employees' resistance can force managers to rethink or reconsider the intended change-related initiative. This can also become a firewall or filter that can help organisations to choose the particular change which would be the most appropriate in a specific situation. Resistance is simply a very effective, very powerful, very useful survival mechanism (Jager, 2001).

It is necessary to draw attention to the insight of Ford and Ford (2010) that resistance is a concept which is used by leaders to highlight behaviour and communication

that they dislike or do not want to happen. What leaders call resistance does not depend on the behaviour they observe; it rather depends on the interpretation and decision of the observers. Those who are considered to be resisting will hardly admit their misbehaviour. On the contrary, people who are perceived as “resistors” may think that their behaviour is in line with the aims and values of the organisation and that they are acting in support of them. A similar attitude is held by Vos and Rupert (2018) who found that the initiators of change are more susceptible to the recipients’ resistance than the recipients themselves.

There are three identifiable dimensions of resistance to change (Piderit, 2000; Oreg 2006). Resistance to change is defined as a three-dimensional (negative) approach involving emotional, behavioural and cognitive components. These components reflect three different expressions of the object or situation evaluated by people. The emotional component evaluates how an individual feels due to change (e.g. anger, anxiety); the cognitive component encompasses what an individual thinks about change (e.g. Is it necessary? Will it be useful?); the behavioural component covers the actions or intentions to act in response to change (e.g. complaining about changes, trying to persuade others that the change is negative). All three components are not independent of each other, and what people feel about change often corresponds with what they think of the changes and the future intentions of their behaviour. Nevertheless, the components differ from each other and each of them emphasises a different aspect of resistance.

Lines et al. (2015) assume that the Emotional dimension of resistance is defined as emotional and psychological responses that employees experience due to change. The Behavioural dimension explores resistance in terms of employees’ action

response. The Cognitive and Emotional dimensions are often considered the sources or causes of resistance, whilst the Behavioural dimension is the actual expression of resistance, manifesting in the form of obvious behaviour, deeds or events.

Scholars focus mostly on behavioural resistance to change, as it is the only directly observable dimension (Lines et al., 2015). Managers have many ways to define specific behaviour that expresses employee resistance: “push back”, “non-buying”, “criticism”, “delay”, “bypassing”, etc. Such descriptions cover a wide range of behaviours, including delayed responses to requests, providing critical or negative comments, and agreeing to take actions but eventually refraining from doing so. Resistance includes almost any behaviour, ranging from “eye-rolling” to open sabotage (Ford and Ford, 2010).

Resistance to change can take the form of a variety of individual or collective actions and can be expressed as ineffective, indifferent, passive or active behaviour. In all cases, the intention of resistance to change is beneficial to the interests of the participant or the group to which he or she belongs (Giangreco and Peccei 2005). Scientific literature identifies similar basic forms of employee behaviour in resisting the process of implementation of organisational innovation.

Scholarly insights on the concept of employees’ resistance to change and the forms of its manifestation are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. The concept of the employee resistance process

Process
The process involves the change <b>initiator and the recipient</b> , who view this process from their different points of view.
<p><b>The three-dimensional (negative) approach</b>, involving emotional, behavioural and cognitive components. The <b>Emotional</b> component evaluates how an individual feels due to change (e.g. angry, anxious); the <b>Cognitive</b> component evaluates what an individual thinks about change (e.g. Is it necessary? Will it be useful?);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Cognitive and Emotional dimensions are often considered as the sources or causes of resistance.</li> </ul> <p>The <b>Behavioural</b> component involves actions or intentions to act in response to change (e.g. complaining about the changes, thus trying to convince others that the changes are negative).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Behavioural dimension is the actual expression of resistance, manifesting in the form of obvious behaviour, deeds and events.</li> </ul>
<p>Patterns of employees' behaviour:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- passive resistance, aggressive actions;</li> <li>- passive or active methods;</li> <li>hidden or open expression of negative reactions;</li> <li>- passive or active resistance</li> </ul>
<p>Forms of manifestation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- individual or collective actions;</li> <li>- hidden or open expression of negative responses;</li> <li>- ineffective, indifferent, passive or active behaviour.</li> </ul>
<p>Examples of employees' resistance to change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "eye-rolling";</li> <li>- open sabotage;</li> <li>- carrying out only the minimum necessary actions;</li> <li>- passive cooperation;</li> <li>- hiding or withholding to report useful information;</li> <li>- openly impeding, prevention, etc.</li> </ul>

Source: Own elaboration based on: Kotter and Schlesinger, 1979; Piderit, 2000; Giangreco and Peccei, 2005; Oreg, 2006; Van Dijk and Van Dick, 2009; Ford and Ford, 2010; Berna-Martinez and Macia-Perez, 2012; Talke and Heidenreich 2013; Lines et al., 2015; Popa et al., 2018.

The behaviour of employees in resisting the process of implementation of organisational innovation can evolve as passive / hidden or, conversely, as active / open forms of behaviour. As described in scientific literature, the abovementioned forms of employee behaviour while resisting innovation in the organisation are the most outstanding ones, and therefore, an opinion survey of the employees of different socio-demographic characteristics regarding the peculiarities of their behaviour can be an effective tool to properly evaluate and understand employee behaviour at the time of organisational change, and to encourage the successful implementation of innovation in the organisation.

## 2. Data and methods

An anonymously completed questionnaire survey of employees working in the group of companies providing public pas-

enger transport services was carried out. The survey included public passenger transport service providers in Klaipėda which provide passenger transportation services within a unified coordinate system. To investigate the problem, companies from one sector were deliberately selected, i.e. the survey was carried out in the companies of Klaipėda city (both private and municipal) that organise and service public transport routes. The selection of companies in this sector was based on the fact that the Klaipėda public transport system has implemented the following innovations: an e-ticket system, a bus routing and positioning system, a passenger information system, as well as an integrated route network. The implementation of the abovementioned innovations resulted in reduced costs and cost price of public transport tickets, optimised costs of passenger transportation, and increased num-

bers of passengers and trips taken. Thus, the specified innovations led to significant changes in all companies of this sector. The need for innovation in this sector is particularly high as it concerns a large part of society, is related to technological processes and is directly related to the environmental improvement. There are approximately 500 employees working in all of them. The sample is  $n = 247$ . The innovations implemented in the sector had an influence on changes to the work organisation of each company and employee.

The data obtained during the research was processed applying statistical analysis and data processing software SPSS

version 19.0. Statistical significance is assessed at  $p < \alpha$  level (statistical significance is assessed at the level of  $p < 0.05$ ).

### 3. Research results

Having performed a scientific literature analysis and identified two main forms of employee behaviour in resisting the process of innovation implementation, employees were questioned about their behaviour while resisting innovation in the organisation. The wording of the question was as follows: In case you disapprove of the implemented innovation, how do you demonstrate your resistance? The responses obtained are provided in Table 2.

**Table 2. The distribution of the respondents' opinion categorised by how they evaluate their behaviour while resisting innovation (%)**

Statement	Totally agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Totally disagree (1)
I actively and openly demonstrate my disapproval, and try to impede the process of innovation implementation.	14.5	23.6	19.0	28.1	14.9
I passively observe and take secret actions against the success of innovation implementation.	5.4	14.9	23.1	33.1	23.6
I behave in a neutral manner and take neither open nor secret actions, and wait for the changes to unfold.	17.7	30.9	27.2	17.3	7.0

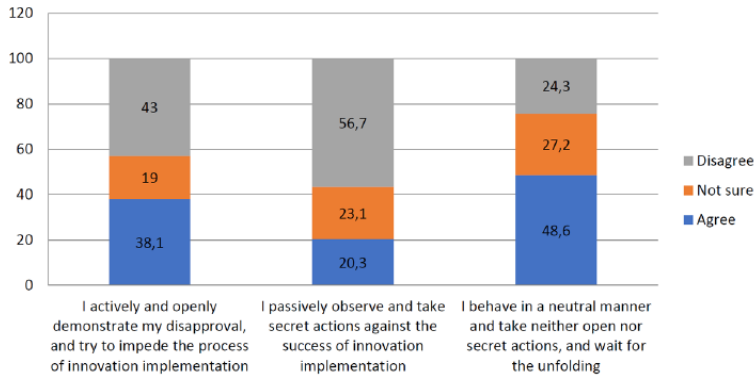
Source: Own elaboration.

The obtained data is summarised by summing up the possible responses ("Agree" = "Totally agree" + "Agree" and "Disagree" = "Disagree" + "Totally disagree"). The results obtained are provided in Figure 1.

The results provided in Figure 1 clearly show that the highest percentage of respondents are in favour of the neutral position – almost 49% of respondents supported the statement "I behave in a neutral manner and take neither open nor secret actions, and wait for the changes to unfold". A sufficiently significant percentage of respondents, i.e. 38.1%, selected the

statement "I actively and openly demonstrate my disapproval, and try to impede the process of innovation implementation". A passive position in public and secret actions against the success of innovation were chosen by 20.3% of the respondents.

**Figure 1. The distribution of respondents' opinion categorised by their actions while resisting the process of innovation implementation (%)**



Source: Own elaboration.

The data provided in Table 2 and Figure 1 reveals the tendency of employees to behave in a neutral manner, although resisting innovation implementation; their disapproval does not transform into openly expressed or secret actions. These research findings are a warning for managers of change processes that neutral behaviour in terms of innovation does not always mean approval of the on-going process. The majority of employees specified that they disapproved of secret actions against innovation implementation. This justifies the premise that the majority of employees are honest and do not tend to act hypocritically against their organisation. Another interesting fact is that employees, although disapproving of innovation implementation, are more likely to be reluctant to express their disapproval actively and openly. Reluctance to openly express their actual opinion may signal that the employees feel incapable of influencing the decisions taken or feel afraid.

The research also explored how the opinions of employees were distributed depending on the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. The data is provided in Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

**Table 3. Verification of statistical significance in terms of resistance to implementing innovation in the company categorised by gender, applying the Chi square criterion**

Statement	By gender		
	Value	df	p
1. I actively and openly demonstrate my disapproval, and try to impede the process of innovation implementation.	5.546	4	0.236
2. I passively observe and take secret actions against the success of innovation implementation.	11.949	4	0.018
3. I behave in a neutral manner and take neither open nor secret actions, and wait for the changes to unfold.	5.510	4	0.239

Source: Own elaboration.

**Table 4. Verification of statistical significance in terms of resistance to implementing innovation in the company categorised by age, applying the Chi square criterion**

Statement	By age		
	Value	df	p
1. I actively and openly demonstrate my disapproval, and try to impede the process of innovation implementation.	12.093	20	0.913
2. I passively observe and take secret actions against the success of innovation implementation.	21.583	20	0.364

3. I behave in a neutral manner and take neither open nor secret actions, and wait for the changes to unfold.	16.799	20	0.666
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Source: Own elaboration.

**Table 5. Verification of statistical significance in terms of resistance to implementing innovation in the company categorised by level of education, applying the Chi square criterion**

Statement	By education		
	Value	df	p
1. I actively and openly demonstrate my disapproval, and try to impede the process of innovation implementation.	19.522	20	0.488
2. I passively observe and take secret actions against the success of innovation implementation.	23.130	20	0.282
3. I behave in a neutral manner and take neither open nor secret actions, and wait for the changes to unfold.	36.222	20	0.014

Source: Own elaboration.

**Table 6. Verification of statistical significance in terms of resistance to implementing innovation in the company categorised by company, applying the Chi square criterion**

Statement	By the company		
	Value	df	p
1. I actively and openly demonstrate my disapproval, and try to impede the process of innovation implementation.	56.401	20	0.000
2. I passively observe and take secret actions against the success of innovation implementation.	29.311	20	0.082
3. I behave in a neutral manner and take neither open nor secret actions, and wait for the changes to unfold.	36.223	20	0.014

Source: Own elaboration.

The data provided in Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 show that there is no statistically significant difference of employee actions in resist-

ing innovation implementation in terms of gender, age, education nor company. The main socio-demographic characteristic across which the most significant statistical differences were revealed was the position held by the respondents, as shown in Table 7.

**Table 7. Verification of statistical significance in terms of resistance to implementing innovation in the company categorised by position held, applying the Chi square criterion.**

Statement	By the position held		
	Value	df	p
1. I actively and openly demonstrate my disapproval, and try to impede the process of innovation implementation.	32.585	16	0.008
2. I passively observe and take secret actions against the success of innovation implementation.	28.308	16	0.029
3. I behave in a neutral manner and take neither open nor secret actions, and wait for the changes to unfold.	38.231	16	0.001

Source: Own elaboration.

The calculated values of the Chi square criterion reveal statistically significant differences in attitudes depending on the position held in the company. That's interesting that the heads of companies and other members of the administrative staff selected the answers that had encoded the option of least resistance. In contrast to it, the main workforce – drivers – more frequently chose the answers in which passive observation in the hope that innovation would not be implemented, or an attempt to actively resist innovation, had been encoded. Such results suggest that the heads of organisations and administrative staff are not inclined to actively and openly resist the process of innovation implementation that they disapprove of. The tendency disclosed by the main group of employees constituting a majority thereof

(drivers), in expressing disapproval of innovation by means of both active resistance and passive behaviour, should be seen as a serious warning to the managers responsible for innovation implementation that active resistance is not the only signal which indicates that employees disapprove of and resist innovation. Managers have to evaluate active behaviour by means of which disapproval is demonstrated, as well as passive behaviour which also harbours disapproval of innovation, and with this in mind, to plan and implement the actions of change implementation accordingly.

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

The data shows that the actions taken by employees in resisting the process of innovation implementation in the organisation are almost the same in terms of respondents' socio-demographic characteristics. The calculated values of the Chi square criterion reveal statistically significant differences of attitudes only when it comes to the position held in the organisation. As has been already stated, the heads of companies and other members of the administrative staff selected the answers that had encoded the option of least resistance. On the other hand, the main workforce – drivers – more frequently chose the answers in which passive observation in the hope that innovation would not be implemented, or an attempt to actively resist innovation, had been encoded. Such results suggest that the heads of organisations and administrative staff are not inclined to actively and openly resist the processes of innovation implementation that they disapprove of, and that disapproval of innovation by employees who hold regular positions can be expressed in two ways, both through active resistance and through passive behaviour.

In discussing the topic in question, it is worth mentioning and confirming the insights of scholars, since the research results revealed that certain dimensions can be identified in the resistance of employees, as specified in the works of other researchers (Piderit, 2000; Oreg 2006). Employees have revealed that what they think about the change is one thing (cognitive component), and how they actually behave is another thing (behavioural component). The employees were mostly characterised by passive neutral and active open forms of behaviour while resisting the process of innovation implementation in the organisation. The fact that passive behaviour is one of the main forms of resistance to changes was confirmed by Giangreco and Peccei (2005).

The following research conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, The attitude shaped by the scientific literature that the behaviour of employees resisting the process of innovation implementation in the organisation is defined as an expression of hidden or open negative reactions, protection from the planned changes, or constraining forces which resist the leaders of restructuring and the acquisition of new competences. Such behaviour may take active, passive, open or hidden forms. Secondly, the empirical research revealed that the majority of employees of public transport service providers, although resistant to change, behave in a passive and neutral manner, and take neither open nor hidden actions, but rather wait for the changes to unfold. A smaller percentage actively demonstrate their resistance and try to impede the process of innovation implementation. one-fifth of respondents support a passive position in the presence of others while taking secret action against the innovation process. Thirdly, the scientific contribution of this research is that neutral behaviour in terms of innovation changes does not always

mean approval of the implementation of organisational innovation. The majority of employees are honest and do not tend to act hypocritically against their organisation, although the fact that one-fifth of the employees may have dishonest intentions should be taken into consideration. For a variety of reasons, employees, although resisting the process of innovation implementation, avoid active open expression of their resistance. Fourthly, employees' behaviour while resisting innovation is almost the same in terms of respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, with the exception of the position held in the organisation. In practice, the research results may be important to the perception of managers that, although employees do not openly and actively demonstrate their resistance to innovation, this does not mean that they support the introduced changes. The passive behaviour of employees is one of the forms of resistance. Fifthly, attention should be drawn to the objective circumstances that may lead to the limitations of the research. It should be noted that the research was conducted only in one city, and only one specific sector was investigated – namely companies which provide services in the scope of the public passenger transport system. These companies also have their own specificity – the majority of employees are male, aged 45-64, and with secondary, special secondary or post-secondary education. The innovations implemented in these companies are particularly specific and more often than not are determined not by the desire of the company's managers to improve the performance of the organisation but by the desire of the state institutions, or the institutions which perform their functions, to improve the public transport system in order to make it more convenient for users.

Taking into account the limitations of the research, to achieve generalised research results, the plan is to further extend research to companies of a foreign country's analogous sector, or to companies of a different sector, thus allowing for the comparison of the findings. Having researched the topic of employees' resistance and its forms, the ways and means of how to overcome and reduce employees' resistance to change should also be further developed, thus carrying out a comprehensive analysis of the research object.

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