

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AS KEY OF CHANGE LEADERSHIP

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of internal marketing communication strategies and employer branding approaches on strategic human resource management, as well as their effect on organizational change management. This will be achieved using a holistic narrative approach to research, examining current market trends, relevant and available scientific literature, and a case study on acquisitions of retail chains. The aim of the study is to develop a conceptual model of organizational change management based on communication strategies. The findings suggest that the developed conceptual model creates the necessary prerequisites and significantly influences the encouragement of effective leadership during changes, as well as reducing employee resistance in the process of implementing organizational changes. Also, this study offers a deeper understanding and supports decision-makers, while encouraging further research by scholars. However, it is limited by the descriptive approach, the limited availability of literature, and the small sample size.

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1 Introduction

The management of organizational changes, as both a scientific and practical field, has gained significant attention in recent years, considering the dynamics of innovation, technological advancements, and the challenges of implementing digital business models. A key component in existing organizational change models is the efficient and effective communication of the vision, goals, and values of change. This is crucial for increasing the level of employee engagement, reducing the level of resistance to change, and fostering resilience to new situations (Collins, D. 1998). According to numerous authors and statistical data, Kotter's change management model (1998, 2014) is the most used in practice today. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of communication strategies on strategic human resource management and their effect on organizational change management and change leadership, through internal marketing communication and employer branding. The aim of the study is to develop a conceptual model of organizational change management based on communication strategies. This will be accomplished through a holistic narrative research approach, which examines current market trends, relevant scientific literature, and a case study on retail chain transformations. Accordingly, the study hypothesizes that internal marketing communication strategies and employer brand development have a positive impact on employee resilience and successful change management. These aspects are analyzed and elaborated in this paper using a theoretical, qualitative research approach, based on prior knowledge, practical experience, and available literature collected via the Google Scholar platform, as well as secondary statistical data gathered from statistical report platforms. The limitations of this study are narrative, theoretical research approach, the use of secondary data, the small sample size, and the limited availability of literature. The first chapter introduces the subject matter and provides a literature review used in the study, framed within the integrated multidimensional framework of human resource marketing and communication. After outlining the methodology, a systematic review of the literature and a case study were used to identify the key factors that influence the level of readiness for change. The discussion further presents strategies and conceptual frameworks for organizational change management model, with a focus on leadership development, human resource development, and creative communication strategies. The study also includes an integration of the conceptual framework for human resource development and knowledge management.

2 Literature Review

Considering the subject of the study, and literature, the impact of internal marketing communication and employer branding on organizational change management, can be elaborated from the following aspects:

- Primarily in relation to the aforementioned management of organizational changes, since nearly all models emphasize the importance of communication in spreading awareness of changes, evaluation, and feedback (Collins, D., 1998; Dulanović, Jaško O., 2008; Kotter J. P., 1998; Kotter J.P., 2014; Anderson D., Anderson, L.A. 2010; Lauer T., 2021).
- As part of strategic human resource management, with respect to employee motivation strategies, where employee recognition plays a key role in further encouraging changes through marketing communications and employer branding, via integrated communications and internal communication (Filipović V., Kostić-Stanković M., 2007; Barjaktarović S., Cicvarić Kostić S., Kostić-Stanković M., 2021; Štavljanin V., 2005; Barrow S., Mosley R., 2005; Figurska I., Matuska E., 2013.; Marjanović M., 2024.; Shanmuga Priya G., UmaRaman M., 2021; Reis I., Sousa M.J., Dionísio A., 2021.; Stanković J., Živković R., Gajić J., Brdar I., 2017; Radošević T. B., 2019); and post-acquisition and post-marger period and employee readiness for change (Devenport J., Barrow S., 2009; Khana Z., Soundararajan V., Wood G., Ahammadd M. F., 2020).
- In processes that impact key performance indicators of human resource management strategies, such as: talent acquisition, recruitment, selection, employment, evaluation, employee development, and promotion (Orlić R., 2005), especially the development of new models of human resource management that emphasize the leadership role compared to traditional models (Ulrich D., Grochowski J., 2018), and the proposal of the economic, functional, and psychological value of the employer (Barjaktarović S., Cicvarić Kostić S., Kostić-Stanković M., 2021; Stanojević S., Kostić-Stanković M., Štavljanin V., 2023; Lievens F., Slaughter J. E., 2016; Fernandez-Lores S., Gavilan D., Avello M., Blasco F., 2016; Caputo A., Molino M., Cerato B., Cortese C.G., 2023; Della Corte V., Mangia G., Micera R., Zamparelli G., 2008)), through human resources development.

3 Methodology

Secondary data used in this study were collected through keyword searches on the Google Scholar platform, including scientific journals, articles, books (in full or available sections and chapters), and consulting materials. The case study was conducted based on semi-structured interviews held during July 2024, lasting 45 to 60 minutes, with leaders in change management in mergers, acquisitions, and digitalization of retail chains. The roughly formulated questions focused on processes, strategies, factors, and the interrelation of human resource management and organizational change management. Conceptual models were analyzed and elaborated from the perspective of change leaders.

4 Case Study

These case studies focus on organizational change and the impact of human resource strategies, specifically within the context of organizational transformation, such as mergers, acquisitions, and digitalizations in Central and Southeast Europe, and present a development of a conceptual model of organizational change management. Elaboration is based on processes, strategies, factors, and the interrelationship between human resource management and organizational change management, and multidimensional frame of change leadership.

4.1 Communication as Driver of Change

In the literature and case studies, there is a large number of different drivers of change, both internal and external. This study examines one segment of these drivers from both an internal and external perspective, specifically internal communication, as it is highlighted in the case study for its importance in creating the strategy for implementing organizational changes, as well as in implementation and change leadership. According to Eurostat (2024), employment statistics focusing on communication skills show that internal communication within organizations occupies about 50% of the working time of employed people. The case study analyzed and elaborated in this paper, through the examination of organizational change management models and human resource management strategies during company transformations, also points to the high level of influence and significance of internal communication as a key factor for the success of organizational change

implementation. This is achieved through effective leadership, which primarily involves:

- continuous communication and
- just-in-time responses to received feedback

This creates the opportunity for the:

- exchange of ideas,
- developing good interpersonal relations,
- human resource development,
- activities in developing and implementing strategies, and
- thus foundational sustainable business practices.

4.2 Human Resource as Internal and External Drivers of Change

According to data from the Republic Institute of Statistics of Serbia (2024), the past decade has seen an increase in employment levels, as well as a rise in wages, economic stability, and the security of the workforce and human capital. In the considered case study, the availability of labor and workforce for new business ventures, organizational development, and expansion through the development of distribution networks and communication channels, is one of the key internal and external factors for driving and managing organizational changes, such as acquisitions and business transformations. Special attention is given to the labor market's condition in relation to the required qualifications. In cases of a shortage of necessary qualifications, human resource management strategies focus on talent retention strategies, as well as on attracting and developing new talent. This contributes to increasing employment levels and the value of human capital, effective and efficient knowledge management, and economic and social security, stability, and growth.

4.3 Impact of Human Resource Communication on Change Readiness

Key elements of organizational change management, according to numerous authors and research studies, and elaborated case studies, include the resistance of employees and their level of readiness for change. Resistance has a significant impact on the failure of organizational change implementation, with the failure rate of organizational changes reaching as high as 70%, according to several studies. At the same time, resistance is considered an expected factor during the implementation of changes. Therefore, this paper and case study elaborate the potential of human resources and methods for human resource development, thereby impacting organizational change management. Opportunities for additional development and knowledge, qualifications, skills, and the further development of human resource, aiming to fully utilize the local workforce, which ensures stable and sustainable growth and development. Additionally, during company transformations, attracting and retaining talent also implies the need to adapt to new circumstances, such as technological transformations, digitalization, and changes in organizational systems and business models. From the perspective of human resource development, in this case studies, motivation can be viewed through the conceptual frameworks of developing employee potentials and talents, which are linked to the level of motivation and the desire for specific professional achievements. Therefore, employees' developmental potential primarily depends on their professional and personal characteristics, as well as their level of motivation. Talent development and knowledge management, as a broader scientific field, represents the development potential of a company and a predictive factor for the success of implementing organizational changes, aligning with strategic human resource management. Human resource development during organizational transformations can be considered from two perspectives: the development of employees and talents and the attracting talents. Employee development during organizational transformations can be analyzed through the following frameworks: the development of new generations of employees; integrated communication systems, talent acquisition; the importance of employer branding and human resource internal communications. In order to foster readiness for change and thus increase the success rate of managing organizational changes, internal communication plays a crucial role in leadership and human resource management.

5 Discussion

Communication, elaborated in this paper, especially in terms of feedback and timely response, can significantly contribute to reducing level of resistant, and burnout of employees during the implementation of organizational changes. Technological innovations and increasingly frequent and comprehensive digital transformations, during organizational transformations, mergers, and acquisitions, based on strategies for implementing organizational changes make conditions for successful implementation, based on strategies with a focus on the human factor, mutual interaction, and the use of new technological and digital solutions. Furthermore, based on the development of human resource internal communication, the establishment of trust and good interpersonal relationships fosters the development of teams and human resources, particularly in terms of knowledge management. This enables more efficient knowledge exchange within teams, as well as the acquisition of new knowledge through the implementation and adaptation to new systems and the use of digital solutions. According to statistical data from The Strategic Human Resources Management (SHRM, 2025), communication is a key factor for the success of organizational change management and leadership. In fact, 65% of leaders and managers consider communication the most important aspect. Deloitte's concept (2023) of organizational change management through transformation strategies that strengthen creativity in organizations views transformation management through the lens of employee creativity. Therefore, based on strategies, methods, and techniques for fostering employee creativity and their implementation, the success rate of company transformations increases.

When comparing communication approaches, as well as change management models approaches: top-down, bottom-up, and linear, open dialogue proves to be the more efficient and effective approach, which are elaborated in this paper, especially in terms of human resource development and leadership of organizational change management. According to KPMG (2023), employee experience and organizational culture influence employee behavior and actions, which in turn impacts the outcomes of organizational change management. According to a Deloitte (2023) study, the positive impact of creativity on business development and growth contributes increase level of annual revenue for 10%. Research from Deloitte Digital and LIONS on the overall creativity in business and its impact on transformation success highlights that key elements are employees, as well as other

stakeholders and internal communication. Internal communication as the foundation for further business development and growth based on creative strategy development, and consequently the success of implementing various types of organizational change transformations, can be considered as key factor in successful leadership.

Taking into account the assumption about the key factor of organizational change management, which in the context of integrating marketing strategies and human resources refers to communication strategies, the literature highlights the significant influence of internal communication and the employer's brand on the growth of employee performance. According to numerous authors in recent literature, the influence of internal communication and the employer's brand leads to the growth of employee levels of: performance, satisfaction, motivation, loyalty, productivity, attachment, engagement (Lievens F., Slaughter J. E., 2016; Fernandez-Lores S., Gavilan D., Avello M., Blasco F., 2016; Caputo A., Molino M., Cerato B., Cortese C.G., 2023; Della Corte V., Mangia G., Micera R., Zamparelli G., 2008; Monteiro B., Santos V., Reis I., Sousa B., Sousa M.J., Au-Yong-Oliveira M., 2020; Fernandez-Lores S., Gavilan D., Avello M., Blasco F., 2016). Additionally, the influence of internal communication and the employer's brand results in a positive employee perception through: reduced levels of resistance and increased resilience (Eger L., Micik M., Gangur M., Rehor P., 2019; Almacika E., Eratb S., Akcinb K., 2012; Samoliuk N., Mishchuk V., 2022; Kotter J.P., 1998; Kotter J.P. 2014). Leadership, along with managerial competencies, synergized with leadership elements such as professional and personal characteristics, leadership styles, and authenticity, significantly contribute to and influence the effectiveness and efficiency of organizational change implementation, thus impacting the overall success of organizational transformations and change management.

6 Conclusion

The essential factor of communication, is the establishment of good interpersonal relations as a prerequisite for successful leadership and business. Communication strategies play a crucial role in change management, particularly in shaping and communicating the company's vision and values, which are essential for both employers and employees. Change leaders focus on creating meaningful employee experiences, implementing human resource management strategies, and

emphasizing practices that enhance employee engagement, motivation, and safety during organizational change. These factors are vital for strengthening employee resilience and overcoming resistance to change, where the human factor of the organization plays a significant role. To achieve the desired impact on employees and ensure the effective management of organizational changes, communication strategies must be carefully planned, designed, and executed.

Conceptual model of organizational change management based on communication strategies, which is developed, based on organizational development and change management include: communication strategies, leadership development; human resources development, and can be further developed through a knowledge management system. Within this context, inspiration, creativity development, and motivation are key drivers. Recognition as one of the most significant motivational factors, largely contributing to increased employee satisfaction and engagement.

The contributions of this developed concept are evident both academically and practically. Academically, it advances the field of leadership and change management studies, while practically, it provides a deeper understanding of organizational change management and the impact of marketing communication strategies on the efficiency and effectiveness of implementing organizational changes.

The limitations of this research lie in the small sample size, limited literature, and the narrative approach used.

Future research will adopt a Grounded Theory methodology, focusing on a larger sample of change leaders, human resource managers, and decision-makers. Data collected through semi-structured interviews will be analyzed using open coding techniques.

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