

THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN REDUCING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE IN INDUSTRIAL COMPANIES IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study examines the role of organizational communication in reducing resistance to change in industrial companies in Indonesia. It is set against the background that industrial transformation is becoming increasingly intense—driven by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, sustainability demands, global competition, and regulatory changes—yet one of the main barriers is employees' resistance. Data indicates that about 65% of change programs experience moderate to high resistance, which results in implementation delays (average 40%), cost overruns (average 35%), and even complete failure (15% of cases). Resistance is treated as a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors. The research uses mixed-methods with a sequential explanatory design: a quantitative phase involving 350 respondents from 35 companies and a qualitative phase involving 25 informants through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies. The quantitative findings show that the quality of organizational communication has a negative and significant effect on resistance to change ($\beta = -0.58$; $p < 0.001$). In addition, aspects such as openness, consistency, timely delivery, participation, and empathetic communication are associated with mechanisms that reduce resistance by improving understanding, increasing trust, and strengthening employees' sense of ownership. The study also finds that an integrated communication strategy positively affects change effectiveness ($\beta = 0.62$; $p < 0.001$), and that communication effectiveness mediates the relationship between communication strategy and resistance reduction, supported by qualitative findings considering the importance of two-way communication, layered and repeated messaging, leveraging informal leaders, and management role modeling.

Keywords : Organizational Communication; Resistance To Change; Change Management; Industrial Companies; Industry 4.0

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INTRODUCTION

Industrial companies in Indonesia have faced intensifying transformation pressures in recent years. The Fourth Industrial Revolution, sustainability demands, intense global competition, and regulatory changes have forced industrial companies to undertake various organizational changes. These changes include digitalization of production processes, adoption of new technologies, organizational restructuring, changes in work culture, and business model transformation.

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However, the implementation of organizational change in Indonesian industrial companies often faces significant challenges in the form of employee resistance. Data from the Indonesian Employers' Association (APINDO) shows that 65% of change programs in industrial companies face moderate to high levels of resistance, resulting in implementation delays (an average of 40%), cost overruns (an average of 35%), and even complete failure (15% of cases).

Resistance to change is a complex phenomenon influenced by various psychological, social, and organizational factors. Employees in industrial companies, whose work is often routine, structured, and procedure-oriented, tend to be more resistant to change than those in other sectors. Factors such as uncertainty about the future, fear of job loss, lack of understanding of the benefits of change, and feelings of loss of control contribute to the emergence of resistance.

In this context, organizational communication emerges as a critical factor in managing resistance to change. Effective communication can help reduce uncertainty, build understanding, create a sense of ownership, and manage employee expectations. However, many industrial companies in Indonesia still employ a traditional, top-down, and one-way communication approach, which can actually exacerbate resistance.

This research is important for several reasons. First, industrial companies are the backbone of the Indonesian economy, making their successful transformation crucial for national growth. Second, resistance to change is a major obstacle to industrial transformation. Third, effective organizational communication can be a strategic tool in managing change. Fourth, there is limited research comprehensively examining the role of organizational communication in reducing resistance to change in the context of Indonesian industrial companies.

Based on the background above, the formulation of the research problem is: What are the characteristics of resistance to change in industrial companies in Indonesia?. What are the patterns and effectiveness of organizational communication in managing change in industrial companies?. What factors influence resistance to change in industrial companies?. What is the role of various forms of organizational communication in reducing resistance to change?. What communication strategies are most effective in managing resistance to change?. How to measure the effectiveness of organizational communication in reducing resistance to change?

General Objective To analyze the role of organizational communication in reducing resistance to change in industrial companies in Indonesia and to develop an effective communication model for change management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Resistance to Change Theory

The concept of resistance to change is understood as any behavior that attempts to maintain the status quo when an organization faces pressure to change. This definition emphasizes that resistance is not merely rejection, but rather a response to maintain familiar conditions. In general, resistance can manifest in three main forms: cognitive (mental disapproval of change), affective (negative emotional reactions to change), and behavioral (actions that hinder the process of implementing change in practice). Thus, resistance can be seen through the thoughts, feelings, and actions of affected organizational members.

In practice, resistance to change is also influenced by several interrelated factors. According to Kotter & Schlesinger (2008), resistance can arise from parochial self-interest, or threatened personal interests, for example when individuals perceive change as detrimental to them. Furthermore, misunderstanding occurs when stakeholders lack a clear understanding of the purpose and objectives of change, while low tolerance for change indicates a low ability to adapt to new situations. Another contributing factor is different assessments, namely differences in judgments about the need for change—whether the change is considered urgent, relevant, or simply unimportant.

Resistance in the industrial context has more specific characteristics, primarily due to the work environment that tends to demand precision, standards, and consistency of processes. Resistance can take the form of technical resistance when certain parties reject technological change, procedural resistance when there is resistance to changes in work procedures, cultural resistance when change clashes with the organization's ingrained culture, and structural resistance when change affects organizational structures such as roles, authority, or coordination patterns. Therefore, understanding the type of resistance is an important first step so that handling strategies are not general but rather tailored to the character and source of the obstacle. In this

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context, organizational communication theory is also relevant because communication functions as control (regulating behavior), motivation (motivating and clarifying goals), emotional expression (expressing feelings), and information (conveying information for decision-making), as explained by Robbins & Judge (2019).

Furthermore, the relationship between communication and resistance to change can be explained through various communication and change management theories. Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) emphasizes that communication can reduce uncertainty, which is a major source of resistance, particularly regarding future states, personal impact, and the implementation process. Furthermore, Social Construction of Reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) suggests that communication helps construct shared meaning about change through the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Meanwhile, the theory of justice in communication (Greenberg, 1987) states that fair communication can reduce resistance through distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. Therefore, communication strategies need to be designed through channel selection (formal, informal, digital, and face-to-face), content adjustment (rational, emotional, visionary, and practical), and timing (before, during, and after change), so that communication is truly effective—timely, accurate, complete, understandable, and credible—and finally resistance can be managed through an integrated model from the stage of identifying sources of resistance (diagnostic phase), designing strategies (strategic phase), implementing (implementation phase), to evaluating effectiveness (evaluation phase).

Framework for Thought and Hypothesis

Framework:

Organizational Factors → Resistance to Change → Change Performance

↑ ↓ ↑

Communication Strategy → Communication Effectiveness → Resistance Reduction

↑ ↓ ↑

Individual Factors → Acceptance of Change → Success of Change

Research Hypothesis: H1: The quality of organizational communication has a negative effect on the level of resistance to change H2: Openness of communication has a positive effect on

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understanding of change H3: Consistency of communication has a positive effect on trust in change H4: Timeliness of communication has a negative effect on uncertainty H5: Participation in communication has a positive effect on the sense of ownership of change H6: Empathy in communication has a negative effect on anxiety about change H7: Integrated communication strategy has a positive effect on the effectiveness of change management H8: Communication effectiveness mediates the relationship between communication strategy and resistance reduction.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a mixed-methods design with a sequential explanatory approach, where data collection and analysis were conducted in stages. The first phase was the quantitative phase, which used surveys to examine relationships between variables and form the basis of the research model. The second phase was the qualitative phase, conducted through in-depth interviews to explain the quantitative findings in more detail, including understanding the mechanisms, processes, and experiences underlying resistance and the effectiveness of change. In this sequence, the quantitative results were used as a reference to deepen interpretations through qualitative data.

The study population was employees and managers at industrial companies in Indonesia that were undergoing or had recently undergone organizational change programs. Inclusion criteria included manufacturing companies with at least 100 employees, change programs that were ongoing or completed within the last two years, and programs involving at least 30% of employees. The quantitative sample consisted of 350 respondents from 35 companies using stratified random sampling, while the qualitative sample consisted of 25 informants (change managers, supervisors, and employees) using purposive sampling to ensure that the informants selected were truly relevant to the context of the change being studied.

The research variables include communication quality, communication strategy, and communication style as independent variables; the level of resistance and effectiveness of change as dependent variables; and understanding of change, acceptance of change, and commitment to change as mediator variables. The study also considers moderating variables such as the type of

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change (technology, process, structure, culture), company size, organizational culture, and history of change. Data collection techniques include questionnaire surveys (online and offline), document analysis, observation in the quantitative phase, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, case studies in five companies, and content analysis in the qualitative phase. Quantitative data analysis was conducted through descriptive statistics, EFA, CFA, SEM, hierarchical regression (for moderation), bootstrapping-based mediation analysis, and cluster analysis, while qualitative analysis used thematic analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, and triangulation. Finally, the study implemented validity and reliability tests (including content validity through expert judgment, construct validity, criterion validity, and reliability with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability) and maintained ethical aspects through informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, and the principle of beneficence .

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Phase Results

Respondent Profile

Table.1 Respondent Characteristics (N=350)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Man	210	60%
	Woman	140	40%
Age	<30 years	105	30%
	30-40 years	140	40%
	41-50 years	70	20%
	>50 years	35	10%
Education	High School/Vocational School	140	40%
	D3	70	20%
	S1	105	30%
	Masters/Doctoral Degree	35	10%
Years of service	<5 years	105	30%
	5-10 years	140	40%
	11-20 years	70	20%

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Characteristics	Category	Frequency Percentage	
		Frequency	Percentage
	>20 years	35	10%
Position	Employee	210	60%
	Supervisor	70	20%
	Manager	56	16%
	Board of Directors	14	4%
Type of Industry	Manufacturing	140	40%
	Automotive	70	20%
	Electronic	56	16%
	Textiles	42	12%
	Other	42	12%

Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Table .2 Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables

Variables	Mean	Elementary	School	Min	Max	Skewness
Communication Quality	4.35	1.18		2.20	6.80	-0.28
Communication Strategy	4.25	1.22		2.00	6.90	-0.32
Resistance Level	4.85	1.15		2.50	7.00	-0.25
Understanding Change	4.45	1.20		2.20	6.80	-0.30
Acceptance of Change	4.30	1.25		2.00	6.70	-0.35
Effectiveness of Change	4.40	1.18		2.40	6.90	-0.27

Validity and Reliability Results

Table.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Construct	Item	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Communication Quality	20	0.68-0.89	0.95	0.62
	18	0.65-0.87	0.93	0.59
Resistance Level	24	0.66-0.88	0.94	0.61
Understanding Change	12	0.64-0.86	0.91	0.58
Acceptance of Change	12	0.63-0.85	0.90	0.57
Effectiveness of Change	20	0.67-0.90	0.96	0.63

Table .4 Reliability Test Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Communication Quality	0.94	0.95
Communication Strategy	0.92	0.93
Resistance Level	0.93	0.94
Understanding Change	0.89	0.91

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Acceptance of Change	0.88	0.90
Effectiveness of Change	0.95	0.96

Hypothesis Testing Results

Table .5 Results of Structural Equation Modeling

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Information
H1	Com Quality → Resistance	-0.58	8.25	<0.001	Accepted
H2	Openness → Understanding	0.52	7.15	<0.001	Accepted
H3	Consistency → Trust	0.48	6.65	<0.001	Accepted
H4	Punctuality → Uncertainty	-0.45	6.25	<0.001	Accepted
H5	Participation → Sense of Belonging	0.55	7.65	<0.001	Accepted
H6	Empathy → Anxiety	-0.42	5.85	<0.001	Accepted
H7	Com Strategy → Effectiveness	0.62	8.65	<0.001	Accepted

Table.6 Results of Mediation Analysis

Path Mediation	Indirect Effect	Boot SE	95% CI	Information
Quality of Communication → Understanding → Resistance	-0.285	0.042	[-0.372, -0.205]	Significant
Com Strategy → Acceptance → Effectiveness	0.312	0.045	[0.228, 0.405]	Significant
Quality of Comm → Trust → Resistance	-0.268	0.040	[-0.352, -0.195]	Significant

Resistance Cluster Analysis

Table.7 Results of Resistance Cluster Analysis

Cluster	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Cluster 1	High Resistance - High Anxiety	70	20%
Cluster 2	Moderate Resistance - Rational Concerns	140	40%
Cluster 3	Low Resistance - High Acceptance	105	30%

Cluster	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Cluster 4	Passive Resistance - Silent Opposition	35	10%

Comparative Analysis

Table.8 Comparison Based on Position

Variables	Employee	Supervisor	Manager	F-value	p-value
Communication Quality	4.15	4.45	4.85	8.25	<0.001
Resistance Level	5.05	4.65	4.25	7.85	<0.001
Understanding Change	4.25	4.65	4.95	6.95	<0.001

Qualitative Phase Results

Key Findings from the Interview

The sources of resistance to change in industrial companies are generally rooted in psychological and social issues. First, uncertainty about the future makes employees worry about job stability, so change is perceived as a threat to career continuity. Second, a lack of understanding about the reasons for and benefits of change leads to resistance due to inadequate information, which ultimately raises doubts about the program's objectives. Third, fear of competence arises when employees feel unable to meet new demands, so resistance becomes a self-protection mechanism. Fourth, loss of control makes individuals feel they are losing control of their work, while fifth, distrust of management fosters skepticism that change will only benefit certain parties.

In such situations, effective communication patterns are key to reducing resistance. Good communication should not be a monologue, but rather a two-way street through dialogue and opportunities for questions so employees feel heard. Furthermore, layered communication is necessary, with messages tailored to different organizational levels, as the information needs of employees, supervisors, and managers vary. Communication of key messages also needs to be repeated to ensure understanding is maintained. In practice, communication through informal leaders (opinion leaders) helps disseminate messages that are more socially acceptable, while communication through management examples (role modeling) strengthens the credibility of the change.

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However, efforts to manage resistance often encounter communication barriers that can exacerbate resistance. One barrier is a hierarchical culture that limits vertical communication, preventing adequate information flow and making feedback difficult. Another barrier is channel constraints, meaning inadequate communication channels prevent messages from reaching all parties. Furthermore, inconsistent messages from different sources can create confusion and heighten distrust, while poor timing—communicating too early or too late—increases anxiety because employees don't understand the context in a timely manner. Finally, a lack of communication skills among those implementing change can result in unclear, unpersuasive, or ineffective messages that address employee concerns.

A concrete illustration of these dynamics is evident in several company case studies. In an automotive manufacturing company, changes to the digitalization of production lines faced high initial resistance (70% of employees). The strategy implemented included departmental roadshows, Q&A sessions, and technology demos, providing employees with a concrete picture and a space for clarification. Consequently, resistance decreased to 25% within three months, demonstrating that interactive, experiential technology-driven communication can reduce uncertainty and increase readiness. In a textile company, changes to organizational restructuring elicited very high resistance (85% of employees), but a communication strategy involving personal communication by managers, focus groups, and newsletters helped reduce resistance to 40% within six months, demonstrating the importance of an approach that adapts to employees' relational and psychological needs.

The next case study, involving an electronics company, reinforces the findings that information support and continuous learning are essential. This company implemented an ERP system, with moderate initial resistance (50% of employees). The communication strategy involved ongoing training, providing a help desk, and sharing success stories to demonstrate that adaptation is possible and successful. Consequently, resistance dropped to 15% within four months, indicating that communication coupled with practical support can reduce competency concerns and accelerate the change acceptance process.

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Based on the research results, the Integrated Change Communication Model (ICCM) was developed as an integrated communication model to reduce resistance through five components. The first stage is the Diagnostic Communication Assessment, which includes resistance mapping to identify the sources and levels of resistance, stakeholder analysis to understand the needs of relevant parties, a communication audit to evaluate communication channels and effectiveness, and a readiness assessment to assess the organization's readiness to communicate change. The second stage is Strategic Communication Planning, which involves formulating message development (core messages), selecting optimal channel selection, developing a timing strategy to ensure timely delivery, and appointing a spokesperson to ensure credibility. The third stage, Interactive Communication Implementation, emphasizes multidirectional communication (top-down, bottom-up, and horizontal), facilitating dialogue, providing feedback mechanisms, and managing rumors to prevent them from developing into misinformation. The fourth stage, Supportive Communication Environment, builds psychological safety, strengthens trust building, applies empathetic listening, and conducts conflict resolution through mature communication. The fifth stage, Continuous Communication Evaluation, ensures communication is periodically evaluated through measuring effectiveness, adjusting strategies, integrating learning, and sharing best practices.

In the discussion section, the study also found prominent resistance characteristics in Indonesian industrial companies. First, technical resistance tends to be dominant, reflected in higher resistance to technological change (mean = 5.15), as employees feel old skills are becoming obsolete and new competencies are uncertain. Second, resistance is not always individual, but often collective, influenced by group norms and work culture. Third, resistance often appears in passive-aggressive forms, such as slowdowns, subtle disobedience, or the spreading of undisclosed rumors. Fourth, resistance is more driven by fear-based resistance, namely the fear of losing a job, being incompetent, or changing roles, rather than simply rational rejection of the idea of change.

Furthermore, the study showed that communication quality significantly influenced resistance, with a negative relationship ($\beta = -0.58$, $p < 0.001$). This finding is in line with the idea that communication serves to reduce uncertainty, which is a major source of resistance. The most

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important aspects of communication quality include openness to reduce speculation and rumors, consistency that builds trust, timeliness that reduces anxiety, and completeness of information so that employees get a complete picture of the change. Furthermore, the study also confirmed that an integrated communication strategy has a positive impact on the effectiveness of change ($\beta = 0.62, p < 0.001$), especially through a multi-channel approach, tailored messaging according to the audience, the implementation of two-way communication, and continuous communication throughout the process.

The mechanism by which resistance decreases can be explained through a mediation analysis, which reveals several pathways. First, the cognitive pathway demonstrates that communication increases understanding, which in turn reduces resistance. Second, the affective pathway demonstrates that communication strengthens trust, thus reducing resistance due to increased psychological safety. Third, the behavioral pathway emphasizes that communication can foster a sense of belonging, thus reducing resistance behavior. At the same time, the study also found differences in perception based on organizational level: employees tend to experience inadequate communication and higher resistance; supervisors act as liaisons and are therefore better able to interpret messages; while managers have better access to information and therefore lower resistance.

Finally, the study concluded that communication effectiveness is influenced by contextual factors such as organizational culture (hierarchical vs. participatory), history of change (previous experience), trust in leadership, and job security perception. Theoretical implications include expanding the study of change communication to an industrial context through the ICCM, integrating resistance typologies with communication strategies, and paying attention to contextual factors in the model. Practical implications include the ICCM as a diagnostic tool for mapping resistance and communication needs, as a guide for developing change communication strategies, and as a basis for designing training programs for those involved in change communication.

CONCLUSION

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Based on the research results, it can be concluded that resistance to change in Indonesian industrial companies is multidimensional and influenced by technical, psychological, and social factors. Technical resistance to technological change is the most dominant form, followed by resistance to procedural and structural changes. Furthermore, resistance is understood as a phenomenon that does not arise in isolation, but rather is formed from a combination of individual concerns, social dynamics in the workplace, and adjustments to new demands. Therefore, efforts to address resistance need to consider the various dimensions of its causes, not just the superficial aspect of "rejection" of change.

Research also shows that the quality of organizational communication and integrated communication strategies play a critical role in reducing resistance to change. Open, consistent, timely, and comprehensive communication can reduce uncertainty, build trust, and enhance understanding of change. This effectiveness is further enhanced when organizations adopt an integrated approach compared to partial communication, as strategies that combine multiple channels, tailor content, manage timing, and open two-way communication spaces result in a more significant reduction in resistance. The mechanism for reducing resistance occurs through multiple pathways: cognitive (increasing understanding), affective (building trust), and behavioral (developing a sense of ownership), which explain how communication works more systematically. Other findings also confirm differences in communication perceptions and levels of resistance based on organizational level, industry type, and individual characteristics, with operational-level employees tending to experience inadequate communication and exhibiting higher resistance than managerial-level employees. Furthermore, the Integrated Change Communication Model (ICCM) developed in this study is considered effective because it integrates diagnostic aspects, strategic planning, implementation, the supporting environment, and ongoing evaluation. Finally, contextual factors such as organizational culture, history of change, trust in leadership, and perceptions of job security moderate the relationship between communication and resistance, so that communication effectiveness is strongly influenced by organizational context.

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