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Educational Employees' Perceptions Regarding Changes in Educational Organizations

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Ramazan YIRCI⁴

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of educational employees regarding change with regards to various variables. The study was carried out with a qualitative design. An interview form compatible with the study aims was created and content and face validity of the form was determined by consulting with expert opinion. Research findings suggest that change is required in schools and that changes should begin with upper management. In addition, because of a lack of information in educational organizations and because employees were not motivated by their managers regarding change, a resistance against change was detected. When viewed from this perspective, in order to cope with this resistance and promote change successfully, employees are required to agree with the decision by way of making an effective plan.

Keywords: educational organizations, change, resistance against change, educational employees.

Introduction

In order to survive in the globalizing and actively competitive world, it is crucial for organizations to adapt to changes that occur in the social and managerial context, without deviating from organizational targets. In this rapidly changing era of information, organizations have to adapt to the changes occurring around

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them in order to sustain their existence, to become more productive, to effectively attain their goals, and to increase their level of competitiveness (Erdogan, 2004; Ozdemir & Cemaloglu, 2000; Colak, I., Altinkurt & Yilmaz, 2014; Calik, 2003; Bercovitz & Feldman, 2008). According to the related literature, change, which is very important for organizations, is defined as; change in the present state based on a specific condition; taking decisions to suggest new ideas for the organization and the process of implementing these decisions. From another perspective, the term change is defined as the planned or unplanned conversion of an organization from one state to another (Tezcan, 1980).

Change is also regarded as an element of creativity and innovation by organizations. Thus, change in organizations not always occurs under the supervision of managers. Change, which occurs in order to adapt to the changes that take place in social, political or economic areas, can be either positive or negative. While a positive change process enhances the organization's effectiveness; a negative change process causes a decrease in organizational effectiveness because it cannot control the events that occur after the change and it causes a move away from organizational targets (Caliskan, 2007; Sabuncuoglu & Tuz, 1999; Sekerci & Canpolat, 2014).

One concept which is widely used together with change, is organizational change. Thus, organizational change is defined as change that takes place in the operations of employees, in the value systems within an organization, in the relationships between organization members or in their behaviors, or transforming working habits of employees into some other form and increasing productivity (Saylan, 1998; Wolff, 2005). When change is regarded as an effective process which promotes organizational sustainability and development, rather than just an obligation, benefits that change will offer to the organization can be listed as (Newton & Tarrant, 1992; Papadopoulou & Yirci, 2013; Erdogan, 2004; Ozdemir, 2004): (1) Change liberates organizations from stability, which causes them to the refrain from organizational targets, and enlivens them; (2) Draws the attentions and interests of employees to targets; (3) Change increases worker motivation by offering the organization new and different opportunities, and contributes to work satisfaction; (4) Change decreases the undesired effects of organizational, cultural and individual differences and creates an environment of trust; (5) Enlivens organizational atmosphere; (6) Offers career development opportunities to employees; and (7) Increases tolerance to individual, cultural and organizational differences.

Although organizational change offers significant benefits for the organization, responses given to change in organizations can vary. Cameron and Green (2015) examine responses to organizational change under five titles:

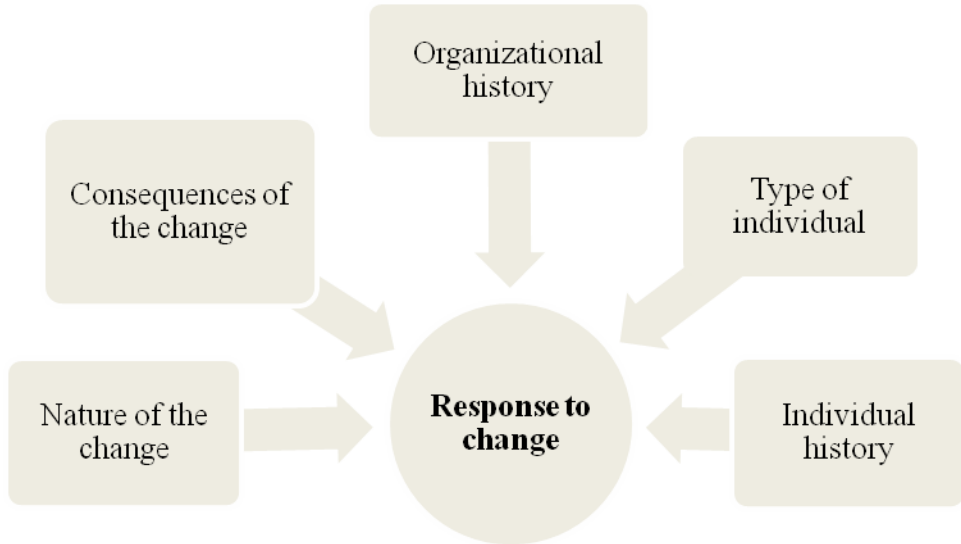


Figure 1. *Five factors in responding to change*

According to Cameron and Green (2015), individual characteristics are the main determinants of the responses given to change. Thus, the motivational sources (power, status, title, money, and gender etc.) of individuals can significantly affect the responses given to change. Individual factors become more important in responses given to change that occur in educational organizations, which are also social organizations. This is because the main interests of educational organizations are people. Training students with better quality in educational organizations depends on fully internalizing the concept of quality within the organization. In addition, offering a qualified work force that will ensure persistence of society is one of the crucial areas of duty for educational organizations (Sisman & Turan, 2014). Thus, it is crucial for educational organizations to rapidly adapt to unprecedented changes that occur in this information era. As in all organizations, the most important factors in changes of educational organizations are school managers. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2011) assert that school principals are the most effective people in instigating change, reform and innovation in schools. Change is an inevitable fact and it is crucial for educational managers to continuously be in contact with internal and external stakeholders in order to realize the various expectations of society (Can, 2002). In order for

change to bring about positive outcomes, educational managers with influencing skills should act like change agents. However, as Gilley, Quatro, Hoekstra, Whittle, and Maycunich (2011) states, this is not an easy duty to perform, because managers may not be ready for the uncertainty and complexity that the change process will cause.

Today expectations from schools and their duties have increased significantly (Lick, Clauset, & Murphy, 2012). Thus, in educational organizations, change is mentioned together with concepts such as; innovation, reform, development, reconstruction, organizational developments, and effective schooling. Planned organizational change and innovation, together with the term reform, are usually used to express the same fact in education. Today, educational organizations have to encounter life-wide changes that occur in economic, political, social, and cultural areas. Economic fluctuations, political conflicts and cultural changes have significant effects on educational organizations (Calik, 2003; Cavanagh & Dellar, 2001). Because sources allocated for education are not sufficient for change and development, the quality expected from education is unattained. Together with changes, schools have parted from being organizations that load information onto students and are now required to turn into structures that furnish students with skills concerning seeking out and obtaining information and creating new information. In the information society, where each shareholder is expected to carry many social, economic, and political skills, along with reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, educational organizations can meet these needs (Can, 2002; Cavanagh & Dellar, 2001; Drucker, 1994).

Schools have to undergo change and set high standards for themselves throughout time. Change is not only a breathtaking process, but also a process which causes pain. For this reason, some individuals can feel uneasy and show resistance against change due to the stress that change brings about. Employees can also get offended during this process (Newton & Tarrant, 1992). Only willing and persistent managers can develop effective schools under these conditions (Thody, 1998). Due to the nature of change, school managers can consider it an opportunity to transform schools into learning organizations when teachers show resistance against change. A successful change process will help employees to embrace and accept their duties and responsibilities regarding the organization (May, 1999). One other crucial element in a successful change process is to positively canalize the attitudes of employees towards change. Managers who can succeed in doing this can break the resistance against change, otherwise this will lead the organization into an undesired process (Kursunoglu & Tanriogen, 2007; Kondakci, Zayim, & Caliskan, 2010). Change, which is a difficult and troublesome process for organizations, is crucial for the organization to sustain its existence (Basaran, 1996). This study aims at determining how education employees perceive the event of change, which can be identified as the struggle of an organization to

survive - to become extinct. Answers to the following research questions were sought in this current study:

- Is change necessary from the viewpoint of schools?
- From where should change management begin in schools?
- Are there any drawbacks for change in schools?
- What successful/unsuccessful examples for changes have occurred in schools?
- What strategies should be adopted in order to promote successful changes within educational organizations?

Methodology

The phenomenological design is one of the qualitative research approaches, and was used in this current study which aims at determining educational employees' perception regarding change. Phenomenological design refers to focusing on the facts that we are aware of, yet have no deep or detailed understanding of (Yildirim & Simsek, 2008). In the phenomenological design, the aim is to reveal new practices and to define and explain the meanings that participants draw out (Annells, 2006). In this method, it is easy to explain the investigated subject by taking participant experiences and opinions into consideration. (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Merriam, 2014). Thus, for the research, phenomenological design, which consists of focus group and semi-structured interviews, was adopted in order to determine educational employees' perceptions regarding change. Purposeful sampling method was used in determining the study group. This method enables researchers to deeply examine events that are believed to consist of rich information. Five open-ended questions were formed according to the purposes of the study, and directed to educational employees who were assigned as principals. For the reliability of the study, it is crucial to treat the participants in an equal manner, in order to conduct the study and extract data under equal conditions (for example the order of questions should be the same for all participants), and to collect a large amount and accurate data (Newman & Benz, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Opinions of field experts, school managers and teachers were taken into consideration while preparing the question form. The study group consisted of 21 educational employees.

The collected data were analyzed by applying the content analysis method. Interview forms collected from the participants were evaluated based on the questions, and any forms with insufficient explanations were considered invalid, and rejected from the data results. The data were analyzed by configuring them into electronic forms. The data were coded and configured in free-code lists as "TY1, TY2, TY3..., TY21". When the categories were arranged, participant opinions were assigned to these categories. Finally, the connections were

determined and transformation stages of the findings carried out. Terms which resulted from the analyses were in line with the findings, and were patterned in a way that reflected the relationship between each other. The most poignant opinions are featured in the result findings in a way to assure they remain in keeping with their intended meaning.

For the reliability of the study, expert opinion was consulted to in order to determine whether or not participant opinion was in line with the category in which they were placed. At this point, all participant opinions which were regarded as valid were placed in a category (without exclusions). The formula, which was developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), was used for reliability and is given below.

$$\text{Percentage of Agreement}(P) = \frac{\text{Consensus}(Na)}{\text{Consensus}(Na) + \text{Dissidence}(Nb)} \times 100$$

In qualitative studies, the percentage of agreement is expected to be 70% (Miles & Huberman, 1994), or 90% (Saban, 2004) and above for the reliability of the study. Field experts, whose opinions were consulted as a means to test the study's reliability, placed two of the opinions in different categories than the researchers; thus, the reliability was calculated as $P = 163 / (163 + 8) \times 100 = \sim 95\%$.

Results

The necessity of change at schools was the initial point that was questioned within the scope of the study. All of the participants stated that change was necessary at schools. As is obvious in the saying "the only thing constant is change", change is an inevitable must for schools, and participants also stated the necessity of change for schools to realize the expectations of society. Schools and teachers adapted to the technology-oriented changes within the Turkish Education System and this emphasized the fact of allowing school visions to be open to change. It was stated that change, planned with a different viewpoint by participants, should not be regarded as change carried out only affecting physical conditions. Participant opinion underlined the emphasis on taking human relationships and people into consideration while beginning any process of change within educational organizations -as the inputs and outputs of such organizations are people- are given below:

TY 7: The world is under constant change, transformation and mobility. In our era of information, the fact that information constantly changes has obliged us to adapt to these changes in order for them to survive in society. As social organizations, schools should adapt to the rapid changes occurring around them, because they interact with, and obtain their inputs from and distribute their outputs back to their societal environment. Otherwise, they will become adrift from organizational aims. Thus, change is an inevitable requirement for schools.

TY12: Change is necessary for schools. Change is must in order to adapt to the changing world and living conditions. Systems which cannot conform to change will vanish in a short time. While living conditions and technology is under constant change and transformation, schools are expected to undergo changes in parallel. Today, in which audible, visual and laboratory potentials show a high level of development, societies who fail to cling to this change are bound to adhere to societies who improve and innovate by change. While the only thing constant is change, it is of course impossible to fall behind change.

Participants were asked the question, “from where should change begin at schools” for a more successful and effective change. According to responses, all of the participants expressed their opinions stating that change at schools should begin with the “top management”. While two participants argued that whilst change should begin at the top management, it can also begin “under the leadership of managers”, like in the example of the French revolution where change most certainly didn’t begin at the top. Participants, who argued that change at schools should begin by activating low level employees under the leadership of the senior management, emphasized the importance of the school manager being the “change agent” of the school. Also, the importance of the school manager (leader) informing and convincing employees about the changes occurring within the school was highlighted. Participants stated that it was crucial for school managers to have the required knowledge and equipment in order to promote change. They claimed that it would be a drawback to successful change if managers acted by considering only the legalities, regulations and rules. It was stated that school managers should take risks to assure a change process is successful. Notable participant opinions that summarize this are given below:

TY10: Change at schools should begin at the superstructure, because change success depends on its applicability. It is the duty of the top managers to pave the way for change, to explain the changes and to convince and motivate employees regarding change. A manager who doesn’t recognize the essence of change will not offer a sufficient level of support to lower level employees. Managers should first believe in the need for change, and then to motivate employees in this direction. Finally, the ground should be set and changes should be put into practice.

TY21: Change should begin from the superstructure to be able to consider school success, to favor it for interests and to strengthen weak areas. It is crucial for the school management to support the stakeholders in order that they can become aware of their responsibilities by fully explaining the need for change. The aim of change is to raise awareness. Productivity will increase once awareness exists. I believe it will be beneficial for employees to improve themselves, along with technological improvements. Change should be triggered and controlled by the top management in order to achieve common influence.

In order to organizationally benefit from the common influence of change, which should be initiated by the top level of senior management and which should include all employees, it is crucial to correctly identify the challenges. Thus, drawbacks against change within schools were determined according to participant opinions. Participants, who stated that it was normal for individuals who are not aware of the nature of change to show resistance against it, asserted that there was a fear to lose the potential of the present, which lies in the background of such resistance against change. According to the participants, giving insufficient acknowledgement about the impact of changes on employees, managers being unable to display leadership behaviors, changes occurring too often or excessively, and the pressure exposed by the social environment are among the crucial drawbacks of any change. The present culture of the school, negative opinions of employees about change, providing employees with insufficient acknowledgement about change, senior management imposing change on lower level employees, planned changes causing inconvenience to the sociocultural features of the school are also among the drawbacks. Participant opinions that summarize this are given below:

TY2: There are drawbacks for change in schools. These can be caused by the management, teachers, students, or parents. Changes should be made in the education system and education programs as the number of students and teachers increase. There will of course, be opposition when these changes are carried out, which may well be due to psychological reasons. People can judge events in a biased manner. They may be asked to give up or change their habits and learned behaviors. At this point, the teacher can experience fear [they may panic about whether or not they can implement the change, or doubt whether or not they will succeed]. I believe that experienced teachers can undergo these feelings more than younger teachers, who are perhaps a bit more open to change. One other reason for opposing change is sociological. If the group to which the individual belongs stands against change, then so will the individual. The responsibility falls especially to the top managers and directors to prevent such a happening. They should include teachers in the change process and resort to their opinions. Individuals should feel themselves as a part of any change. Top managers should have advanced performance skills and skills in persuasion and the convincing of others. All stakeholders should join in the change process. Thus, the level of opposition can be reduced as much as possible.

TY14: There are drawbacks implementing changes in schools. For example, the environment, student intelligence levels, the setting and location of the school, climate conditions of the district, financial means, existence of teachers who have closed themselves off to change, and parents etc. are all potential drawbacks. Let's say you a project that will improve teaching and training activities at your school and you want to go ahead and implement it. The teacher doesn't adopt it and tries to prevent it. Parents choose not to participate or support it, and also try to prevent it. Students' level of intelligence may be low and the project may fail to reach its stated aims. The setting and climate conditions of the school may be unfavorable, and this can cause drawbacks for the project.

Figure 2 displays analysis of the findings resulting from educational worker assessments of changes made to the Turkish Education System.

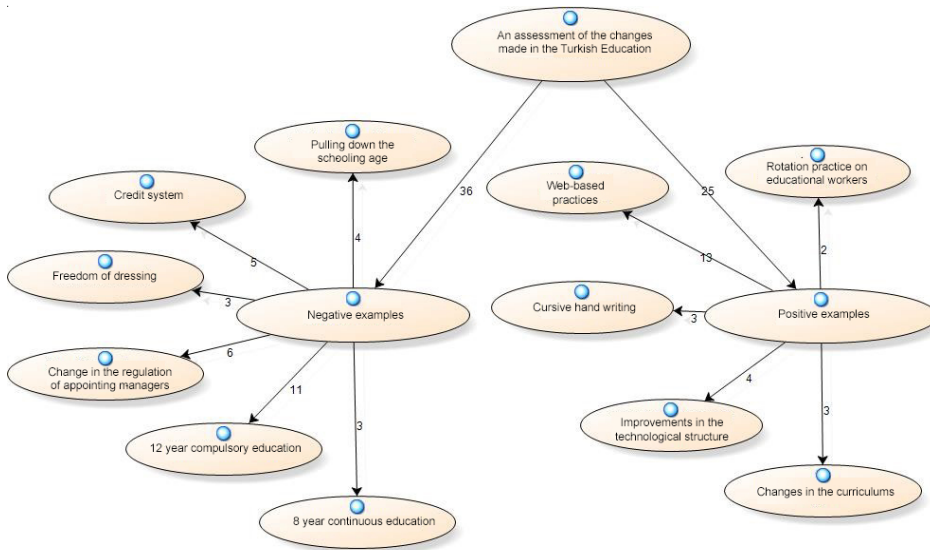


Figure 2. Assessment of changes to Turkish Education, according to participant opinion.

21 participants whose opinions were gathered in this research expressed 25 positive and 36 negative opinions. Changes in the Turkish Education System concerning “lowering school starting age to 60 months” and “enforcing 12 year compulsory education” were regarded as a failure by the participants, because the system was not considered ready for such changes and the changes were implemented so quickly. Giving the students “dress freedom” at schools was among the unsuccessful changes because it was enforced without considering the sociological side effects it caused. Abolishing the practice at the end of the same year confirms this view. Just like the “change to 12 year compulsory education”,

the “credit system” implemented under the Turkish Education System during 1992-1993 academic year in Secondary schools was a failure. The “management appointment regulations” change, which was enforced during the 2014-2015 academic year to the Turkish Education System was regarded as an unsuccessful change by the majority of participants. Similar participant opinions that are examples of negative changes to the Turkish Education System are given below:

TY6: Enforcement of the 12 year compulsory education system (4+4+4) is a change implemented with the proposal of only 3-4 members of parliament and without seeking opinion from other bodies. The positive side was that compulsory education was increased to 12 years. The negatives are considered as: (a) Buildings not sufficient for service; (b) Number of classroom teachers required became excessive; (c) Increased need for branch teachers; (d) Increased number of lesson hours (36 hours weekly); (2) Many schools continuing primary and secondary education in the same building.

TY10: One major change made by the Ministry of National Education [MoNE, or MEB in Turkish] is eight years continuous education. Infrastructure works and needs analysis (teacher needs, classroom needs, materials needs) weren't performed when instigating and enforcing the eight year education change, and families who lived in provinces with mobile education encountered many problems. Vocational High Schools, which provide intermediate employees for society, were at the point of being closed down and as a result harmed the national economy.

TY13: The dress code has brought about successful and also unsuccessful results. When the code dressing was made unrestricted, it became difficult to understand who was a student and who was not. And because there are differences in income, families with lower income had difficulties in exercising freedom of dress code in practice.

TY4: The credit system was expected to enable students to choose the profession that fits their interests and skills and to help them prepare for university. In the credit system, while student success was course-based at the end of the term, no changes were made in the Regulation for Passing the Grade Level. This practice was also a failure because the required basis was not structured. Physical conditions were not fulfilled. [It is evident that the change failed as it was made without providing the required infrastructure and environment.]

TY22: A significant change carried out by MoNE is the appointment of managers. Because this change was made according to a political aim, it failed to resolve problems of in schools and in fact, compounded and complicated them. I believe that appointing people who have received no education on school management has harmed Turkish education.

The most significant change implemented by the Turkish Education System which received positive opinion from participants was “Web-Based Practices”. These changes carried about by MoNE were stated as successful and positive by 25 participants. 13 of these participants’ opinions indicated “web-based practices”. MEBBIS, which enabled the access to employee personal information, E-Okul and Document Management System (OYS), which enabled access to widespread educational information such as student class letters, attendance, and numbers of books read etc., are among the changes which participants mention often and find successful. Change made to the curriculums of Science and Technology and Math’s courses are among the changes that received positive views from participants. Putting smartboards in every classroom and distributing tablets to students were regarded as positive changes. Participant opinions that summarize this are given below:

TY5: It’s a radical change which I believe has succeeded technologically. Serving the management, teachers, parents, and students separately has strengthened its prevalence and provided feedback. The educator who found himself distant to computers in this changing era was obliged to resolve this. Sometimes people resist against change because they lack self-confidence. When they receive the training and close those gaps, they gain in self-confidence. Integrating with the student’s education process, including all the information about the student and ensuring its continuity were the strengths of E-Okul.

TY11: The change in the mathematic curriculum was successful. This was because every math subject was being taught throughout the whole year for the mathematics course. For example, addition was studied all year long. Thus, it has been a successful change.

TY20: Localization is one of the major problems in education. Although almost all teachers and managers are opposing, this rotation of teachers is a requirement. Redressing possible defects of this practice will bring about the expected success.

Participant opinions regarding attaining goals through change, in other words “what is required for a successful change”, were analyzed and the themes are shown in *Figure 3*.

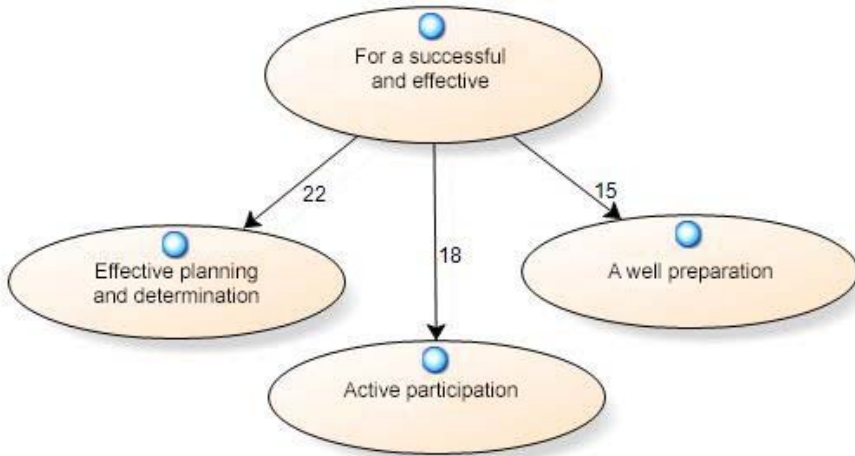


Figure 3. What is required for a successful change?

In order to carry out a successful change, participants underlined the importance of examining units which will be influenced by change. Effective planning of the practices and operations that should be implemented after needs analysis was regarded as crucial for a successful change. One of the important factors in completing change with expected outcomes is enabling all employees to actively participate in the process. Some of the participant opinions that summarize this are given below:

TY13: Planning is the first step required for a successful change. Why change is required and how it will be carried out should be determined in advance. It is important to inform people about the change who will be affected by it. If they need to receive training, they should be given in-service education courses. People who will be directly or indirectly affected by the change should be contacted, and their views and opinions about the change sought.

TY9: For a successful change we should first decide on the change. After the decision-making process we should move on to the planning process. Determining the needs well, analyzing our strengths and weaknesses and considering the environment and social structure are crucial points for planning. From this point, future operations should be determined in a simple, clear and gradual manner. After the planning process, the plan applicators should be organized. Operations must be controlled after the organization process. An effective and accurate control is required for a clear sailing.

Discussions

The purpose of this study was to determine educational employees' perceptions regarding change within educational organizations. All of the participants stated that change was necessary in schools. While it is expected that employees show resistance to change, due to its very nature (Tuncer, 2013); it can also be seen as an opportunity for the Turkish Education System when educational employees support the need for change. Participants stated clearly the need for; educational organizations to be open to changes concerning public, social, economic and political issues, along with the changes concerning expectations. Because change is an inevitable requirement (Argon & Ozcelik, 2008; Ogurlu, 2015), educational employees who are open to change and the managers motivating the employees (Lawrence & Yarlett, 1995) will help promote the improvements expected from the change.

Similarly, all of the participants stated that, for the change to be successful, it is important to begin the change process from the top level down towards the lower level bodies. From this point of view, it would be correct to suggest that a change movement beginning from the Central Organization of the Ministry towards the rural organization bodies will be highly successful. This finding of the research is in line with the result of the study conducted by Sayli and Tufekci (2008) as "may be the most important factor in succeeding in change management is the leadership of the top management body". In order for a healthy change process, managers should each be voluntary change agents and continuously inform all stakeholders. This result is in line with the findings of Werkman's (2009) study. For managers to display this behavior, they have to be open to change and have the necessary equipment. According to Tuncer (2013), it is crucial for educational organizations, whose inputs and outputs are people, to take humanistic factors into consideration during the change process.

The concept "resistance against change", which has frequently been mentioned in the literature, has been underlined in this study as a major drawback against change. Among the reasons why employees show resistance against change are; the fear of losing one's potential, possible work increases as a result of change, organizational culture, providing minimal information to those influenced by change, and the organization not being structured as a learning organization. These findings are in line with the literature (Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Thomas & Hardy, 2011; Kubiato & Arik, 2014; Fugate, Prussia, & Kinicki, 2012; Murtagh, Gatersleben, & Uzzell, 2012). In addition, managers who fail to understand the nature of change impose change on employees along with the pressure imposed by the social environment can be listed as reasons for educational employees to resist change.

Conclusion

When changes in the Turkish Education System are discussed with their results; participants regarded the credit system, the eight year compulsory education practice, the 12 year compulsory education practice, the change in school starting age, free dress code, and changes in the regulation for appointing managers as unsuccessful changes. The reasons for considering these changes as failures can be listed as; promoting the change with a lack of preparation of the physical conditions, promoting change without discussing its necessity, not coming to terms with the change, and a lack of feedback concerning the changes. At this point, it is crucial for decision makers to consider participants' statements for the effectiveness and success of change. Kotter (1999) states that change will be effective and successful when the organization analyzes the need for impending change correctly and when the pre-study is conscientiously carried out. As Yenicieri (2002) stated, effectively managing the change process will help the organization to achieve the output which was targeted by the change. Among the successful changes carried out by the Turkish Education System are the rotation practice for educational employees, web-based practices, and changes in the technological field, enforcement of cursive handwriting, and the changes made to curriculums. Preparing the required grounds before change, providing high quality training that the stakeholders actually need and informing them about the changes in advance can be listed as the features that make changes successful compared to others.

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