

Who Communicates a Change – Research Outcomes from Polish Companies

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SUMMARY

Organizations today are confronted daily with the need for change, and the way in which this necessity for change is relayed may serve to minimize resistance to change. The aim of the study is to diagnose who is the source of this message for change in Polish profit-making enterprises and how many employees take part in the change process team, thereby becoming part of the change and thus the disseminators of the message on change. Computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) survey were the method used. The research sample covered medium and large enterprises and was representative. According to the findings, only 7.3% of employees are involved in the change process, the rest are informed by a superior or co-workers, sometimes co-workers from different departments.

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Journal of Economic Literature (JEL) codes: D22, D23, D83

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations today are confronted daily with the need for change. Although the readiness of recipients for change should not be taken for granted (Nyagah 2017), the importance of constructive communication during the intended changes has been empirically demonstrated and commonly agreed among practitioners. Moreover, communication is considered to be vital for the effective implementation of organizational changes, as great uncertainty and inaccurate rumours arise in cases of organizational change that were communicated badly (DiFonzo & Bordia 1998). A major challenge then is to develop a culture and leadership strategies that allow organizations to cope with change.

One of the possible approaches in facing this challenge may be the communication process, since organizational change and communication are inextricably related processes (Lewis 1999). Since communication is recognized as an instrument of organizational survival and growth (Schweiger & DeNisi 1991; Wanberg & Banas 2000; Bordia et al. 2004), it supports the change process itself by the development of efficient instruments for the measurement and analysis of communication in organizations (Downs et al. 1994).

The importance of communication to successful organizational change cannot be exaggerated. Unfortunately, in the literature – perhaps because of the

complexity of the concept of effectively communicating change – attention is usually limited to particular aspects of change. Lewis, Stephens, Schmisser and Weir (2003) conducted a content analysis on the top 100 best sellers on “organizational change” books available on Amazon.com. This analysis shows five major themes – change enforced by globalization, changes that would happen anyway, change and the survival mechanism – organizations have to survive - change as a daunting and intimidating concept or companies purposely choosing to change. It does not matter if the change focuses on strategic change or a change in the role undertaken in the workplace). Change has been researched in the areas of employee attitudes towards change (Wanberg & Banas 2000; Washington & Hacker 2005; Lewis 2006; Oreg 2006), its pervasiveness in corporate culture (Keyton 2005), expectations and competencies (Heracleous 2002; Clampitt 2005; Frahm & Brown 2005; Hansma & Elving 2008), benefits of employee participation (Lines 2004; Giangreco & Peccei 2005; Msweli-Mbanga & Potwana 2006), characteristics of the change process (Cushman & King 1995; Salem 1999; Dawson 2003; Bennebroek-Gravenhorst et al. 2006;), the course of the change management process (Elving 2005; Fernandez & Rainey 2006), changes in goal setting (Locke & Latham 2002, 2006; Larson & Tompkins 2005) and the resistance to change (Prochaska et al. 2001; Ervin & Garman 2010).

In addition, the assessment of what successful change communication is differs among researchers. Some consider that effective change communication occurs when employees successfully adopt the proposed changes (Robertson et al. 1993). Others evaluate effective change communication by the level of employee readiness for the change (Elving 2005). However, the problem for organizations is that change is not always communicated effectively (Hargie & Tourish 2000; Fernandez & Rainey 2006; Burke 2008; Cummings & Worley 2009).

Failures in the process of introducing change happen either because of inadequate preparation or poor communication of the need for or goals of change (insufficient information, incorrect communication channels, misinformation of employees, poor information, or an incomplete message (Lorenzi & Riley 2003)). Some research, like that of Beer and Nohria (2000) indicates a failure rate of one-third to two-thirds of major change initiatives and even more pessimistic results were noted by Burnes (2004) and Cope (2003, 2011), with a failure rate of up to 80 to 90 per cent. Researchers have also found that at least half of all organizational change programmes do not achieve the intended results (Bennebroek-Gravenhorst et al. (2006), in Husain 2013).

The relationship between managers (superiors) and employees has an impact on the resistance to change. Resistance to organizational change is higher if lack of trust exists (Oreg 2006). Improper management styles (Oreg 2006), management tactics (Furst & Cable 2008) and leadership strategies (Szabla 2007) enhance the resistance to the change. This also applies to employee's perceptions of management's abilities to achieve change (Stanley et al. 2005) the organizational climate, information received regarding the change, participation in the change process and trust in management (van Dam et al. 2008).

To overcome the resistance toward change it is recommended that employees are actively encouraged to participate in the change process (Lines 2004; Giangreco & Peccei 2005; Msweli-Mbanga & Potwana 2006). According to Giangreco and Peccei (2005), employee perceptions of their participation in the development and implementation of the change were associated with more positive attitudes towards the change and reduced resistance to change. Lines (2004) found links between employee's perceptions of their participation and the achievement of the goal, as well as organizational commitment and reduced resistance to change. According to Msweli-Mbanga and Potwana (2006), there exists a positive relation between access to participation and the willingness to participate, while there is a negative relationship between the willingness to participate and resistance to change.

While members of organizations do communicate during change, they concentrate on themes of uncertainty or a lack of information on specific changes. Uncertainty is "an inability to describe, predict, or explain" (Salem & Williams 1984), and complaints of inadequate information

are common in organizations (Daniels & Spiker 1983), with adequate information not being available through such sources as memos, reports, or websites.

Having that in mind, the research questions have been set – how many employees participate in the management teams for change in Polish medium and large-sized companies? And if they are not directly involved in the process, who communicates the change first – their superior or co-workers (i.e., who is their source of information)?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used primary sources. The project was financed by the National Science Center (NCN), decision number DEC-2012/09/B/HS4/02722. For the purpose this research the questionnaire was put together in Polish. The drafted questionnaire was put to consultation in academic society by representatives of the discipline and revised by six competent judges – professors who are considered in the country as best in the discipline. They introduced some modifications to enhance clarity. The question was of close type with three cafeteria answers. It was then pilot-tested on different employee samples and then officially during a final examination. The survey was conducted from April 2015 to January 2016 via telephone by workers trained to facilitate data collection. The companies involved in the survey were randomly drawn proportionally to the number of certain business branches in the country (Statistic Polish Yearbook).

The CATI (computer-assisted telephone interviewing) survey was conducted. The phone calls were directed to 50,212 persons from different companies (chosen randomly), the return rate equals 0.7966 %, which is extremely low. Respondents were randomly selected, and both supervisors and subordinates participated in the survey. Only medium-sized (50-249 employees) and large (more than 250 employees) companies were investigated.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. In the first part, employees were requested to respond to general and demographic questions about their gender, age, length of employment and position in the company. The second part provided specific questions on the types of communication that employees use. Three issues were of interest to the survey – the sender of the message, who initialized the communication process; the information content of the message, and finally the method most frequently used to communicate in the company.

After collecting data a statistician was engaged to ensure proper data processing. Data were coded and processed into SPSS, a statistical package system. Results were analysed and summarized in order to draw conclusions and make recommendations.

RESEARCH RESULTS

A total of 2,274 people from 297 companies participated in the survey on communication patterns as organizational behaviour (in production, service and trade sectors). In terms of gender, the sample population was 64.17% male and 35.83% female. 76.04% of the respondents do not manage people at all (directly or indirectly). Further data characterizing the sample are presented in Figure 1.

As far as departmentalization is concerned, the seven typical departments were recognized, repeated in almost every company – the Selling & Promotion Department, Law, HR, Finance & Accounting, Administration, Production and Customer Service Departments. The 8th category, named ‘Other Specialists’, gathers specialists in narrow fields connected with that branch represented by the organization.

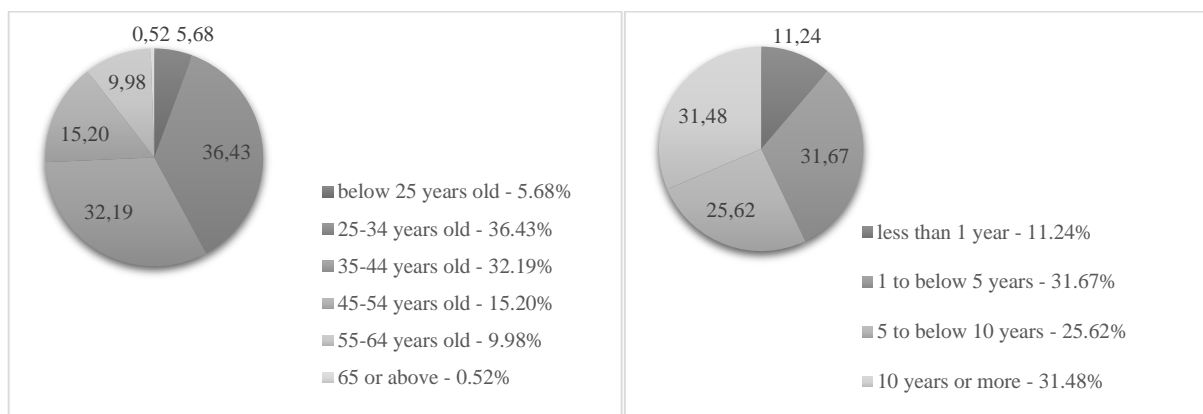
During the research work, three exclusive categories of change advisers were identified. The category of answer named in the figures below as “superior” stands for change order, it means that all changes are imposed and non-

negotiable. The activity is only on the side of the boss with no possibility to alter or modify the change decision.

The category of answer called “superior or co-workers” stands for a managers who project or offers a change, where adjustment and discussion is possible. The essence of the change remains while the details can be discussed and altered. Although an activity to suggest the change is still on the side of the boss, it is negotiable. In the negotiations people from different departments may participate only if they contribute. This category is for imposed and negotiable change.

The category of answer called “team” shows that the activity of suggesting a change rests on both parties – employees and bosses. Suggestions of change can arise from either side and are always discussed before the final change is introduced. The final shape of the change is a result of collaboration. The suggested change may even be rejected if it does not contribute to planned change.

In investigating significant difference, the Pearson Chi-square test of independence was used. If the Chi-square results are significant, post-hoc analysis is then conducted for identifying differences significant at the 0.05 level. The outcomes of the research are presented in the figures below.



Source: own research

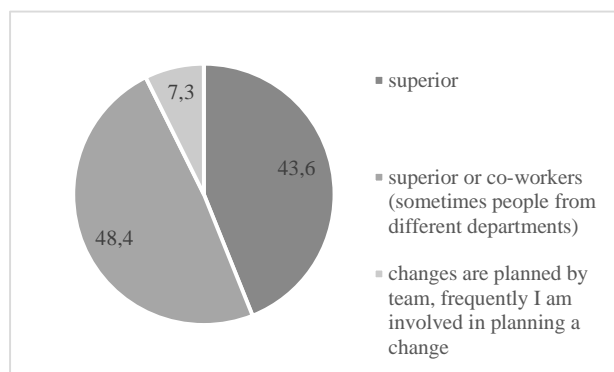
Figure 1. Distribution of age of respondents (left) and length of employment of respondents in the company in which they currently work (right) (%)

A large proportion of the employees – 43.6% – are informed about the organizational change by a superior or are co-designers of a change (Figure 2). Only 7.3% declare that they are co-authors of a change.

In Figure 3, the communicator of the change is shown with regard to the sector. Although this parameter transpired to be statistically insignificant, it may be noticed that employees from service and trade organizations tend to answer that they are part of a change process team and they are co-authors of a change – 8.9% and 8.5% respectively – which is more than 50% higher than occurs in the case of employees from production companies – 5.5%. Employees of production companies say that in 45.9% of cases they learn about change from a superior – this is the highest score out of the three sectors researched. Moreover, 50.2% of employees from the service sector

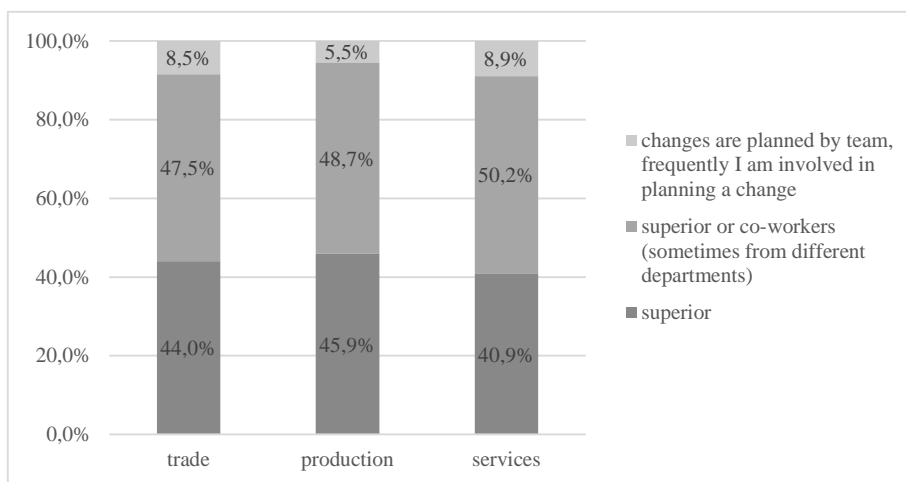
learn about a change from their superior or co-workers. The question then arises of whether the sector itself imposes such behaviour.

The initiator of the communication for change with regard to company size is shown in Figure 4. If the calculation had been done with accuracy to two decimal places, the outcome might have seemed significant. That was the reason the third decimal place was employed. Nevertheless, it is significant – though of no great surprise – that medium-sized companies are more likely than large enterprises to invite their employees to design a change, to be part of a team planning and organizing the change. In addition, information about the planned change in medium-sized enterprises comes from superiors, 44.9%, compared to 40.5% in large companies.



Source: own research

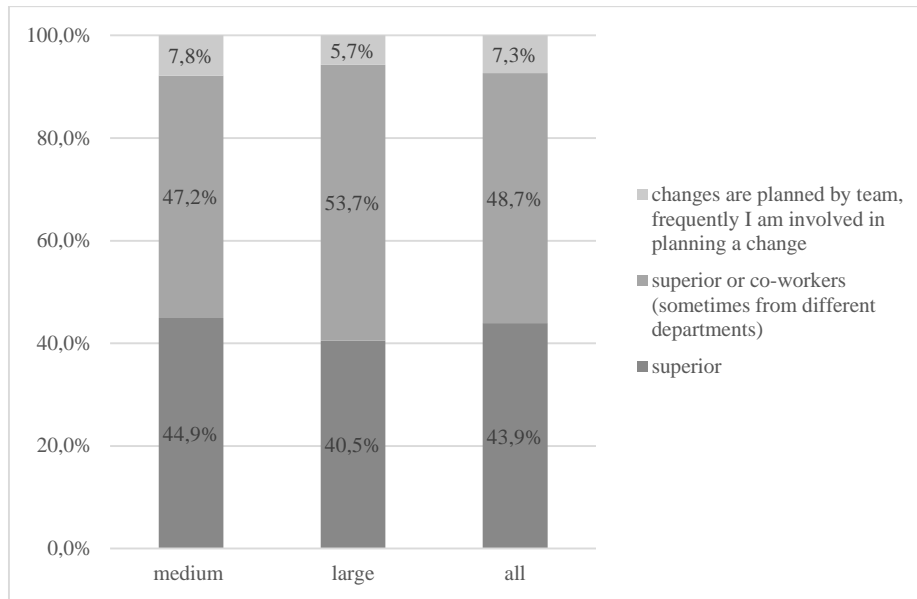
Figure 2. From whom employees learn about changes to be introduced into an organization



$p = 0.068$; Pearson's chi-square = 0.033; Cramer's V= 0.042

Source: own research

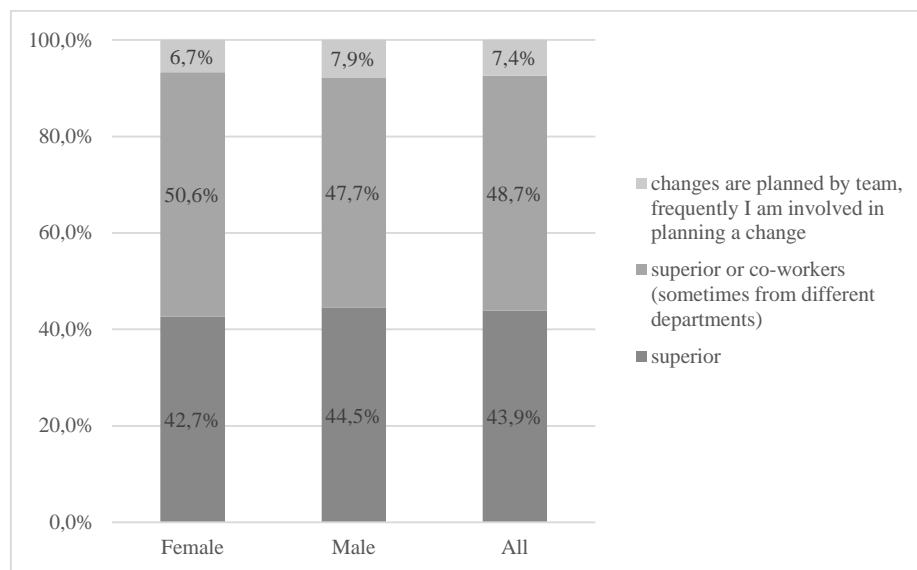
Figure 3. The communicator of the change by sector



$p = 0.058$; Pearson's chi-square = 0.022; Cramer's V= 0.058

Source: own research

Figure 4. Communicator of need for change by company size



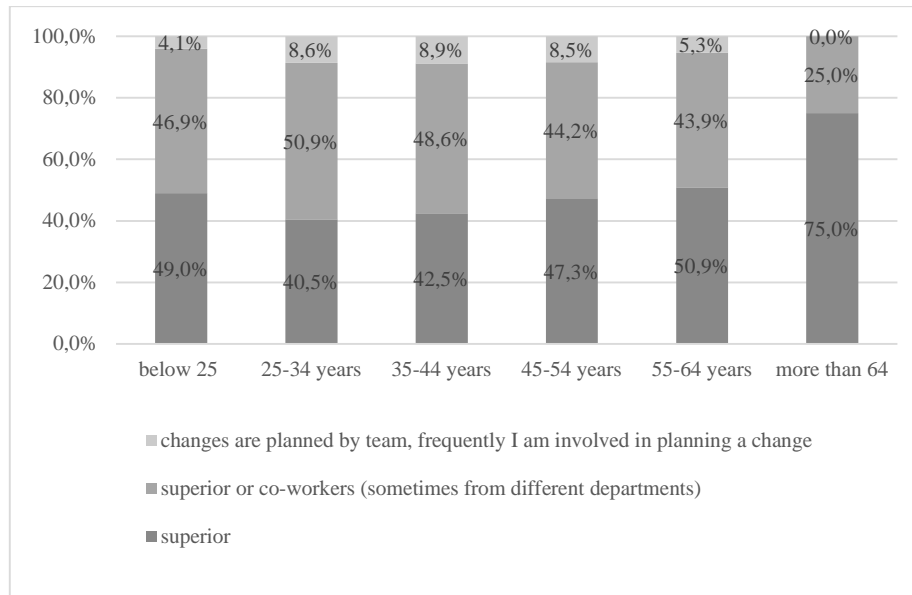
$p = 0.031$; Pearson's chi-square = 0.351; Cramer's V= 0.031

Source: own research

Figure 5. Communicator of the need for change by employee's gender

The relationship between the communicator of the need for change and the employee's gender, shown in Figure 5, is statistically significant. Males slightly more frequently answer that they learn about change from superiors than females – 44.5% male to 42.7% female –

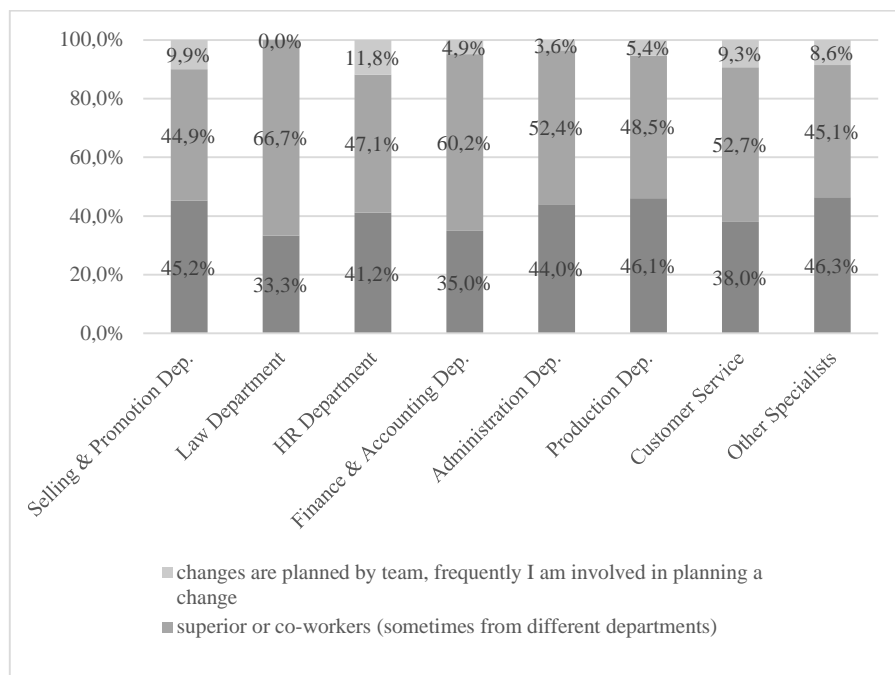
but in the case of learning about the change from a superior or co-workers it is the other way round – 47.7% male to 50.6% female. The strength of this dependence is considered weak.



p = 0.094; Pearson's chi-square = 0.124; Cramer's V= 0.067

Source: own research

Figure 6. The communicator of change and employee's age



p = 0.115; Pearson's chi-square = 0.023; Cramer's V= 0.082

Source: own research

Figure 7. The communicator of change and company departmentalization

The relationship between the communicator of the change and the age of the employee is shown in Figure 6. The age feature is here considered as an order scale (not a nominal scale). However, the influence of age on the answers is again insignificant. One must not fail to notice though, that among no respondent over 64 years old reports taking part in designing and preparing for the change; they are not part of the team for change design

compared to the 8.9% of employees between 35-44 years old. The second largest group of employees taking part in the team planning a change is people 45 to 54 years old – 8.5%.

People above 64 years old form the largest group of people informed about a change by superiors (75.0%), which is the highest score of all the research results

(compared to 40.5% of those aged between 25-34 years old).

The research reveals that lawyers do not take part in the team designing the change (0.0%) but this category shows the highest percentage informed about a change from superiors and co-workers – 66.7% (shown in Figure 7 below). They are also less frequently told about changes planned by a superior – 33.3%.

The HR Department – 11.8%, Selling and Promotion Department – 9.9%, Customer Service Department – 9.3% and Other Specialists – 8.6% are involved in teams constructing organizational change far more frequently – the difference between them and the other departments is significant – around 50% more often.

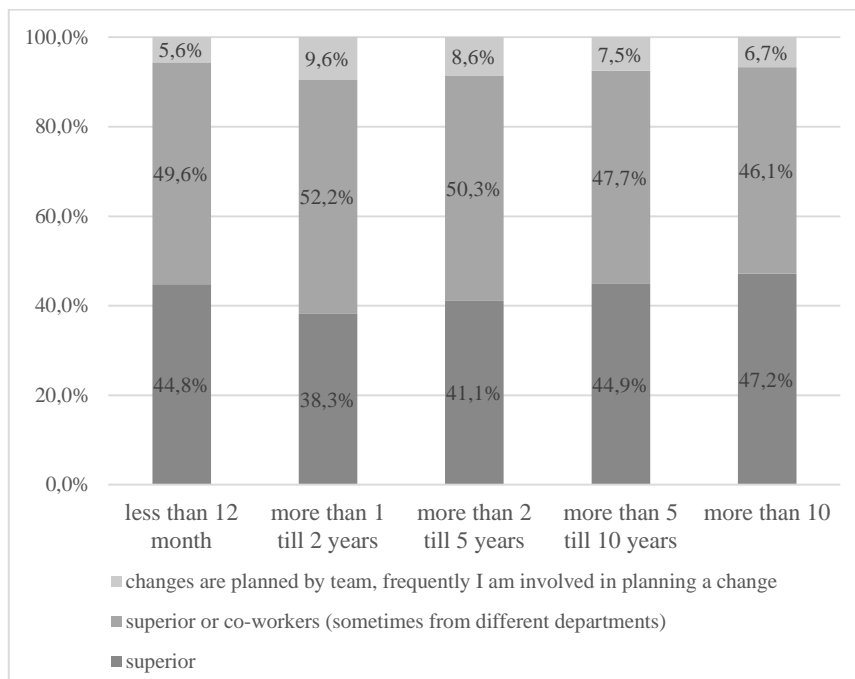
The Selling and Promotion Departments have a roughly equal source of information on change – 45.2% from superiors and 44.9% from superiors and co-workers. A similar situation can be observed in the case of the group of specialists (Other Specialists) – 46.3% from superiors and 45.1% from superiors and co-workers. However, the outcomes are statistically insignificant.

The communicator of change and length of employment in a company employees is also statistically insignificant. Employees working for more than one to two years at their current workplace – 9.6% – are the largest group of employees taking part in designing changes. It is not surprising that the group which is less engaged in those teams is employees having worked less than 1 year for the company – 5.6% - as shown in Figure 8 above.

CONCLUSION

The way employees are informed about changes introduced in organizations is an important issue for the management of organizations. The main objective of the study was to diagnose who is the initiator of the communication about the change process introduced by the company (no matter the change size – from change at the workplace level to a strategy change of the whole company) made in Polish enterprises. This paper only presents the results of research regarding the communicator of the change – by whom employees are informed about the changes being made or how frequently they are invited to participate in the team designing the change (which is frequently emphasized in change management literature as engaging employees in the design and organization of a change in order to minimize resistance to a change).

On the basis of this research (showing that just 7.3% of employees are invited to participate in change design, the rest (that is, 92.7%), are merely informed about forthcoming changes) it is impossible to comment on the causes of the outcome in a responsible manner; only the state of the situation is presented. However, it is, of course, an impetus for further research – e.g. what notice employees are given about the upcoming change.



$p = 0.067$; Pearson's chi-square = 0.308; Cramer's $V = 0.047$

Source: own research

Figure 8. The communicator of change and length of employment

As the conducted research has indicated, few Polish companies tend to invite their workers to participate in the change, meaning to be the co-authors of a change. It would be interesting to establish the cause, as not asking employees to participate in forthcoming changes was usually considered in the literature as reinforcing the resistance to the change.

On the one hand, it is difficult to ask all workers to participate in designing change – too many people bring too many ideas and concepts, and this, in turn, may create havoc and encumbrances. On the other hand, the modern communication technology in common use nowadays may allow every employee to express their position on the

change process planned and encourage them to be a part of the growth and development of the company. Moreover, since we now live in a world of constant change, should it not be normal practice to involve employees in the change process as a systemic and constant activity?

A question for further research arises: with such constant organizational changes, as well as the ubiquitous state of permanent change: is there no necessity for special communication preparation for change, since changes are a part of our daily lives and should be considered the norm instead? How should we deal with the communication aspects of this ability to change in a turbulently changing world?

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