



Strategic Approaches to Enhancing Organizational Vitality

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Abstract

This paper examines organizational change strategies and their impact on organizational vitality and performance in enterprises in Montenegro. It further analyzes how management dominance, employee participation, and information flow interact within the framework of classical change strategy models. The empirical findings indicate that enterprises in Montenegro predominantly rely on directive, top-down change strategies, characterized by low levels of employee participation and limited bidirectional communication. While such approaches support short-term operational efficiency, they tend to constrain the development of long-term organizational vitality. The paper argues that integrating participatory and creative change strategies, including the spontaneous approach, represents a critical strategic direction for enhancing organizational adaptability, innovation, and transformative capacity. The findings further suggest that effective change management should be understood not only as a tool for improving efficiency, but also as a strategic mechanism for achieving sustainable organizational vitality and long-term performance.

Keywords: organizational change, organizational vitality, change strategies, employee participation, performance

1. Introduction

The contemporary business environment is characterized by frequent and rapid changes, high levels of competition, rapid technological development, and continuous digital transformation. Organizations that aim to maintain competitiveness and long-term stability must develop the ability to adapt their structures, processes, and organizational culture effectively and in a timely manner. This capacity for adaptation represents the foundation of organizational vitality and long-term performance.

Organizational change is not merely a technical or administrative process; it is a complex social phenomenon that involves people, their values, beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral patterns. The way changes are planned and implemented directly influences employee motivation and engagement, as well as their willingness to accept new solutions.

For this reason, change implementation strategies play a crucial role in shaping the internal environment and overall organizational vitality. Under contemporary business conditions, organizational vitality is increasingly viewed as a strategic resource rather than merely an outcome of successful performance. A vital organization is not only efficient in the short term but also capable of continuous learning, renewal, and transformation in response to environmental changes. Strategic approaches to change management determine how organizations develop the capacities for long-term sustainability, innovation, and adaptability.

The aim of this paper is to examine, through a combination of theoretical and empirical approaches, the dominant types of organizational change strategies in enterprises in Montenegro, their impact on employee participation and information flow, as well as the implications of such approaches for organizational vitality and overall performance.

2. Theoretical Framework: Organizational Change Strategies and Innovative Approaches

Organizational change strategy refers to the manner in which changes are implemented within an enterprise. Three main types of organizational change strategies can be distinguished: the rational-empirical strategy, the coercive strategy, and the normative-reeducative strategy (Chin & Benne, 1969).

The rational-empirical strategy is based on principles of rationality in implementing organizational change. The driver of change in this strategy is management. However, for employees to accept changes, management must clearly present the situation within the organization, convincing employees of their necessity and usefulness. The direction of change in this strategy is top-down. Although employee participation is limited, changes are usually accepted, even in the presence of resistance.

These changes are implemented through organizational structures and tasks and typically involve only first-order changes, as the process does not allow the redefinition of assumptions about reality, which would constitute second-order changes (Robertson et al., 1993).

The coercive strategy assumes that changes in the organization are implemented by those in power, most often the leader or top management. The direction of change is top-down, with the leader planning the changes and determining the course of action, while employees accept and implement them. These changes occur through the social structure of the organization and involve only first-order changes. The leader uses power to ensure that employees act within the existing organizational culture, without an interest in changing members' beliefs and values (Chin & Benne, 1969).

The normative-reeducative strategy assumes that people are social beings whose values and beliefs must change in order to modify behavior. This strategy is realized through people and their interpersonal relationships, emphasizing the social component. It involves changing the frame of reference, i.e., socially constructed perceptions of reality, which leads to changes in collective assumptions and values. Both management and employees participate in the change process. As a result, resistance is minimal, and information flow is bidirectional (top-down and bottom-up) (McWhinney, 1997). This strategy is more qualitative and time-consuming, as it involves changes in assumptions, values, norms, and employee attitudes.

Many authors argue that this classification lacks a fourth strategy. McWhinney (1997) classifies change strategies as analytical, imperative, participatory, and spontaneous. The analytical (rational) strategy is similar to the rational-empirical strategy, the imperative strategy corresponds to the coercive strategy, and the participatory strategy aligns with the normative-reeducative strategy. The spontaneous strategy, however, involves all employees and encourages individual creativity, enabling second-order changes (Burnes, 2007; Rieg et al., 2021).

The spontaneous (creative) strategy allows employees to express their ideas and feelings, leading to new solutions and supporting organizational transformation. However, this strategy requires more time and resources, while resistance to change is minimal, as changes are realized through creative solutions and structured tasks (Macedo et al., 2024).

In conclusion, the strategies proposed by Chin and Benne correspond to McWhinney's classification: the analytical change strategy closely resembles the rational-empirical strategy, the imperative strategy corresponds to the coercive strategy, the participatory strategy aligns with the normative-reeducative strategy, while the spontaneous strategy complements the original classification (Burnes, 2017)

3. Contemporary Context and Organizational Vitality

Although the strategies discussed were developed in the late twentieth century, they remain relevant in the contemporary business context. Traditional top-down approaches provide stability and control but are insufficient to address the complex and unpredictable changes of the modern environment (Do et al., 2022). Consequently, organizations increasingly combine classical strategies with participatory and creative approaches (Bishwas, 2015; Cameron & McNaughtan, 2014).

Organizational vitality can be defined as the ability to maintain a balance between stability and change, efficiency and innovation, and control and creativity over the long term (Sánchez-García, 2023). Vital organizations are characterized by a high degree of adaptability, well-developed capacities for learning and innovation, and the ability to implement second-order changes (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2024).

Organizational change strategies play a crucial role in developing these capacities. While directive strategies contribute to short-term operational efficiency, participatory and creative strategies serve as key mechanisms for organizational renewal and long-term vitality (Belak & Ušljebka, 2014).

The conceptual model can be better understood through classical organizational change theories. According to Lewin's three-phase model (Lewin, 1947), directive strategies such as rational-empirical and coercive strategies can be associated with the "unfreezing" phase, characterized by top-down communication and limited employee participation. The "change" phase aligns with normative-reeducative and participatory strategies, where bidirectional communication and active employee involvement become essential. Finally, organizational vitality reflects the "refreezing" phase, in which new behaviors, values, and structures are stabilized.

Similarly, Kotter's eight-step model (Kotter, 2012) emphasizes the importance of communication and employee empowerment throughout the change process. In this context, the flow of communication and employee participation, as identified in this study, represent key mechanisms through which change strategies influence organizational vitality. While these classical models provide a structured understanding of change processes, contemporary research suggests the need for more flexible and adaptive approaches. This is reflected in the integration of participatory and creative strategies in the proposed framework. Figure 1. illustrates the conceptual model linking organizational change strategies with key dimensions of organizational vitality through the mediating roles of employee participation and information flow.

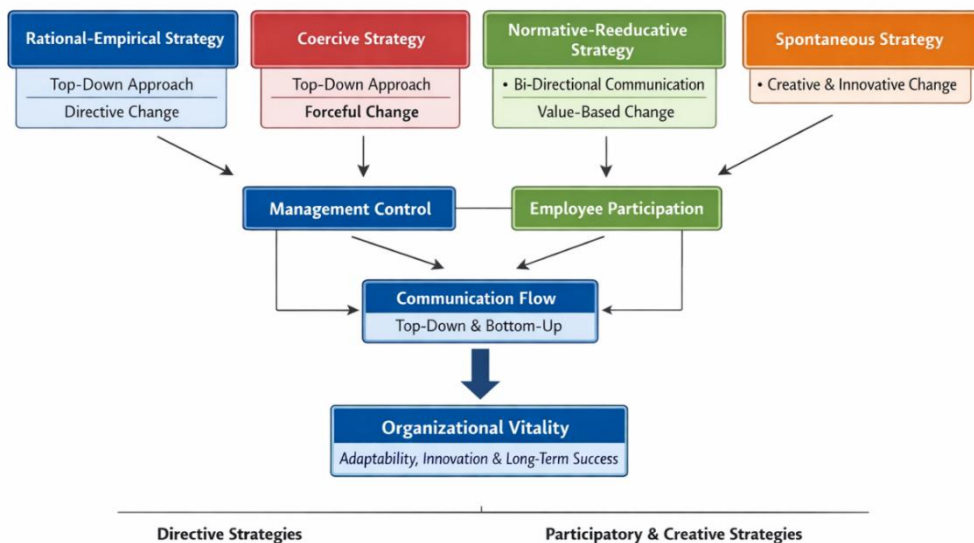


Figure 1. Conceptual model linking change strategies and organizational vitality

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Sample

The study was conducted using a survey method with a Likert-scale questionnaire (1–5), on a sample of 280 respondents from various enterprises in Montenegro. The sample included managers, middle management, and employees from organizations of different sizes and sectors.

Descriptive statistics were applied, including frequencies and percentages, to analyze the characteristics of:

- initiation and implementation of changes,
- employee participation in changes,
- direction of information flow.

This approach provides an overview of the main trends and patterns in organizations without focusing on statistical significance between groups.

Table 1. Sample of Respondents

Respondent Category	Number of Respondents	Role in the Organization
Managers / Executives	60	Initiate and implement changes
Middle Management / Team Leaders	80	Coordinate and implement changes with employees
Employees	140	Participate in implementing changes
Total	280	-

Source: Author's research

4.2 Empirical Analysis

4.2.1 Management dominance in implementing changes

Results show that 57.1% of changes are initiated and implemented by management, 35.8% involve both management and employees, and only 7.1% are initiated solely by employees (Table 2). These findings indicate the use of directive, top-down change strategies.

Table 2. Change Initiators

Respondent Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Management	160	57.1%
Management and Employees	100	35.8%
Employees Only	20	7.1%
Total	280	100%

Source: Author's research

4.3 Employee Participation

Data analysis indicates that 59% of employees are passive or very passive, while 41% actively participate (Table 3). This confirms the theoretical conclusion that an authoritarian leadership style can limit active employee engagement, even when a participatory style is formally applied.

Table 3. Employee Participation in Change Implementation

Participation Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Very Passive	65	23.1%
Passive	100	35.8%
Active	115	38.0%
Very Active	10	3.1%
Total	280	100%

Source: Author's research

4.4 Direction of information flow

The data show that 53.4% of organizations use top-down communication, 11.7% bottom-up, and 34.9% both directions (Table 4). This distribution confirms the presence of directive and centralized change strategies, while innovative strategies require bidirectional information flow so that employees can actively participate in problem-solving and solution creation.

Table 4. Direction of information flow

Information Flow Direction	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Top-Down	150	53.4%
Bottom-Up	33	11.7%
Both Directions	97	34.9%
Total	280	100%

Source: Author's research

5. Discussion (Integration of Classical and Innovative Strategies)

The empirical findings indicate the dominant use of classical, directive change strategies. These approaches provide an important foundation for understanding how changes are implemented in Montenegrin enterprises.

The dominant role of management, low levels of employee participation, and primarily unidirectional information flow reflect stable but rigid patterns of change management.

However, the theoretical framework and research results suggest that incorporating participatory and creative approaches can significantly enhance organizational vitality. The spontaneous (creative) strategy involves active employee participation and bidirectional communication. It reduces resistance and creates opportunities for second-order changes.

In this context, organizational culture in Montenegrin enterprises can act as both a limitation and a developmental potential, depending on how change strategies are applied.

Contemporary tools, such as digitalization and artificial intelligence, can support the transformation of change strategies. They improve information flow and help develop organizational capacities.

This relationship can be further explained through the mediating role of digital transformation. Digital technologies enable data-driven decision-making, allowing organizations to continuously monitor change processes and adjust strategies in real time. In this context, digital tools facilitate faster information flow, enhance transparency, and support bidirectional communication between management and employees.

Moreover, digital transformation supports the development of agile organizational structures, which are more flexible and responsive to change. Such structures empower employees, encourage participation, and create conditions for implementing second-order changes. Through digital platforms, organizations can also foster organizational learning by collecting and analyzing data on employee behavior, performance, and engagement.

Therefore, digital transformation acts as a key mechanism linking change strategies with organizational vitality, as it enhances adaptability, innovation capacity, and the overall responsiveness of the organization to environmental challenges.

6. Measurement and Evaluation of Organizational Vitality

Measuring and evaluating organizational vitality is a key element of strategic change management, as it allows management to objectively assess how successfully an organization balances stability and innovation. The use of indicators such as the Organizational Health Behavior Index (OHBI) (Jaafari et al., 2023) provides a structured approach to evaluating organizational capacity across multiple dimensions – from operational efficiency and employee participation to learning, innovation, and adaptability to change (Kismono et al., 2024; Malhotra et al., 2022).

In this study, organizational vitality is operationalized through observable organizational characteristics, including the level of employee participation, direction of information flow, and the organization's capacity for adaptability and learning. These elements represent measurable indicators of vitality and are directly linked to the applied change strategies.

Monitoring these indicators enables the identification of organizational strengths and weaknesses, allowing management to implement timely corrective measures and better plan change strategies. Evaluating organizational vitality also allows for the analysis of the long-term impact of applied change strategies on enterprise performance, including business sustainability, decision-making agility, and the ability to implement second-order changes (Bishwas, 2015).

In the context of Montenegrin enterprises, where directive change strategies dominate, systematic measurement

and evaluation of vitality can serve as a foundation for integrating participatory and creative approaches, reducing employee resistance, and fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. In this way, evaluation becomes not only a tool for monitoring the current state but also a strategic instrument linking people, processes, and technology to achieve long-term sustainability and overall organizational performance (Jalalabadi et al., 2023; Tisu et al., 2023).

7. Conclusion

The research results confirm that organizational change strategies in Montenegrin enterprises are predominantly based on directive, top-down approaches, which limit employee participation and the development of long-term organizational vitality. While such approaches enable operational stability and rapid implementation of changes, they do not create conditions for sustainable organizational transformation.

The strategic contribution of this paper is highlighting the need to combine classical, participatory, and creative change strategies. This combination supports the development of organizational capacities for learning, innovation, and adaptability.

Organizational vitality, in this sense, emerges as a result of conscious and long-term change management rather than as a spontaneous outcome of business operations.

In conclusion, organizational change strategies should be regarded as a strategic instrument for enhancing organizational vitality, linking human resources, organizational culture, and modern technologies into a unified framework for long-term sustainability and performance.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. The research is based on a sample of enterprises from Montenegro, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other national or economic contexts. In addition, the study relies on a quantitative survey approach, which may not fully capture the complexity of organizational change processes.

Future research could expand the analysis to include organizations from different countries in order to enable comparative insights. The application of mixed methods, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, could provide a deeper understanding of change dynamics. Furthermore, future studies could explore sector-specific differences, as well as the role of digital transformation in shaping the relationship between change strategies and organizational vitality.

9. Practical Recommendations

Based on empirical findings and the theoretical framework, the following recommendations can help Montenegrin enterprises enhance organizational vitality and overall performance:

- **Integration of participatory and creative strategies**
Organizations should actively involve employees in planning and implementing changes. Participation reduces resistance and increases motivation, while creative approaches allow for identifying new solutions and innovations, contributing to organizational transformation and the development of core capacities. Forming interdisciplinary innovation teams that combine management experience and employees' practical knowledge can create decision-making synergies and accelerate change implementation.
- **Bidirectional information flow and transparent communication**
Efficient top-down and bottom-up communication channels should be established to ensure employees are informed about change objectives and can provide feedback. Transparent communication increases trust, reduces uncertainty, and fosters employee engagement, directly contributing to organizational agility and more effective change implementation.
- **Application of digitalization and artificial intelligence**
Digital tools and AI enable process optimization, information flow monitoring, and improved decision-making. Organizations should use software platforms for data analysis, scenario simulation, and tracking change effects, allowing for faster and more precise responses to challenges and increasing overall organizational efficiency.
- **Development of a culture supporting innovation and creativity**

Enterprises should continuously cultivate a culture that encourages openness, innovation, and creative problem-solving. This includes rewarding initiatives, management support in motivating employees, and building trust between leaders and teams. Such a culture reduces resistance to change and increases the potential for long-term organizational vitality.

- **Management training and leadership development**

Managers should develop skills in balancing authority with participatory approaches. Training in change leadership, team management, communication, and strategic planning enables managers to apply directive and participatory strategies effectively, recognize employee potential, and actively involve them in the transformation process.

- **Monitoring and evaluation of changes**

A system for continuous monitoring and evaluation of change outcomes should be established, including performance indicators, employee satisfaction, and process efficiency. Regular data analysis allows timely strategy adjustments, reduces the risk of failure, and contributes to sustainable organizational vitality.

- **Setting strategic goals aligned with long-term vision**

All changes should be planned in alignment with the organization's long-term strategy and vision. Clearly defined goals, priorities, and resources enable efficient and sustainable implementation of changes, directly enhancing overall organizational performance and long-term agility.

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