



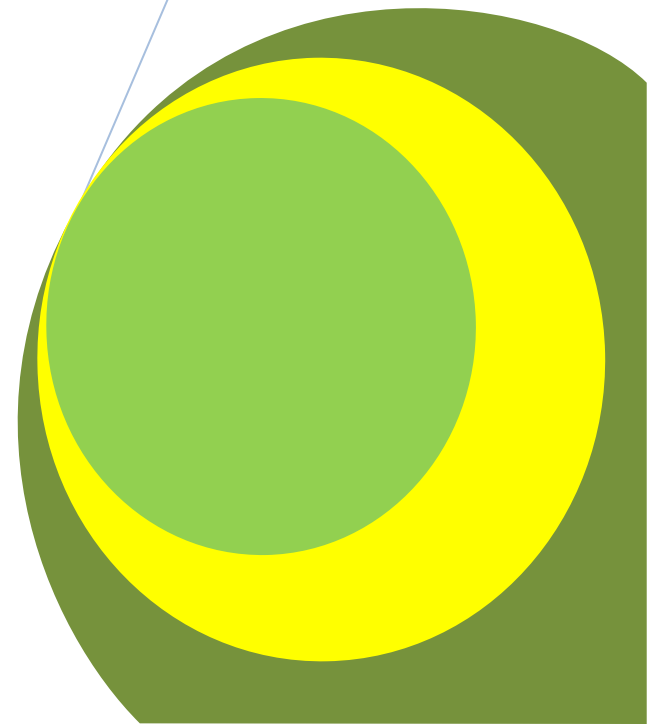
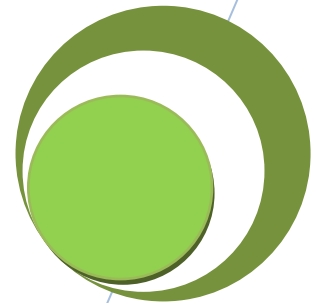
# **Greener Journal of Business and Management Studies**

ISSN: 2276-7827    Impact Factor 2012 (UJRI): 0.6670    ICV 2012: 6.03

## **Impact of Age on Employee Resistance to Change. A Case Study Cotton Company (COTTCO) in Zimbabwe**

By

**Chari Felix  
Chimbindi Vhuramayi  
Chikozho Martin  
Mapira Nyasha**



*Research Article*

# Impact of Age on Employee Resistance to Change. A Case Study Cotton Company (COTTCO) in Zimbabwe

**\*<sup>1</sup>Chari Felix, <sup>2</sup>Chimbindi Vhuramayi, <sup>3</sup>Chikozho Martin, <sup>4</sup>Mapira Nyasha**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Economics-Bindura University of Science Education.

<sup>2</sup>COTTCO-Gokwe.

<sup>3</sup>Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP)-Gweru.

<sup>4</sup>Department of Human Resources Management-Bindura University of Science Education.

Emails: <sup>2</sup>cvhuramayi@yahoo.com, <sup>3</sup>chikozhomartin@yahoo.com, <sup>4</sup>dmapira@gmail.com

\*Corresponding Author's Email: charifelix93@gmail.com

---

## ABSTRACT

The research sought to assess the impact of age on resistance to change. The research was carried in the form of a case study, in which a sample of 60 employees from a population of 120 employees was used. Stratified random sampling procedure was employed in selecting elements from 20 managers and 100 general workers respectively. Questionnaires and interviews were used in triangulation to collect data on the sample. After analyzing the collected data, it was found that employee's age has a great impact on resistance to change and that there is positive correlation between age and employee resistance, that is, the older the employee the greater the resistance to change.

**Keywords:** Age, change, commitment, employee and resistance.

---

## RELATED LITERATURE

Studies have shown a strong human tendency to resist organizational change. With the rapid changes that are overwhelming world organizations, change is becoming an important element of human development and organizational success. Though several explanations for the dynamics of organizational change have been provided, impact of age on resistance to change in its entirety is still far from being satisfactorily explained. The researcher observed that many theorists have said much on the impact of other factors such as beliefs, feeling, culture and values to change processes and less has been said concerning age. Given such a background the researchers felt it as important that a research be undertaken that serves to assess the impact of age on resistance to organizational change process.

Change is any alteration occurring in the work environment that affects the ways in which employees must act (Newstrom and Davis 2002). Burns (2004) argues that change is an ever-present feature of organizational life both at operational and strategic level. Change can be planned, unplanned, transformational or incremental and organizational just to mention but a few.

Resistance to change is any attitude or behavior that reflects a person's unwillingness to make or support a desired change (Hunt and Osborn 1994). Ander (1950) also defines resistance to change as behavior which is intended to protect an individual from the effects of real or imagined change. Bovey and Hede (2001) postulate that the change process consists of four phases which are, initial denial, resistance gradual exploration and eventual commitment. Robbins (2003) adds on and argues that as much as change involves moving from the known to the unknown, resistance is bound to occur

Thompson (1999) defines age as the length of time that a person or a thing has existed. Labour Relations Act (Chapter 28:01) section 11 (2002) states that no contract of employment shall be enforceable against a person under the age of sixteen years. The Act concurs with the memorandum of understanding signed between UNICEF and ILO which abolishes employment of children younger than sixteen years (IPEC 1995). In this regard the employee in Zimbabwe should be sixteen years and above.

Darwish (2000) states that employee commitment plays an important role in reducing employee resistance to change. Walker (1999) argues that employee commitment is better in older workers than in those with 29-39 age range. Employee commitment is an important determinant of resistance to organizational change. Employees with a high commitment are more willing to put more effort in a change project and, therefore, it is more likely to develop positive attitudes towards organizational change (Iverson, 1996; Guest, 1987).

Similarly, Steiner (1979) notes that older employees who perceive that the organization has been open with them on previous organizational activities are also more likely to trust the organization, further intensifying their commitment and willingness to support organizational change. Maaja (2004) purports that older members of the organization do not support organizational goals as much as younger members hence difficult to change. Maaja (2004) is of the belief that older employees have some difficulties due to their previous experience and hence find it difficult to support change.

Lau and Woodman (1995) argued that a highly committed employee is more willing to accept organizational change if it is perceived to be beneficial. However, highly committed employee may resist change if they perceive it as a threat to their working environment. These conclusions suggest that there might be an influence of employee commitment on their attitudes towards organizational change. Iverson and Roy, (1994) postulate that employee commitment is a better predictor of behavioral intentions than job satisfaction within a change context.

Kegan & Lahey (2001) describe a psychological dynamic called a competing commitment as the real reason for employee resistance to organizational change. Judson (1991) states that commitment is built over a long period of time thus young people are less committed as compared to the old people who will certainly resist change to safeguard the long attained commitment. When an employee's hidden competing commitment is uncovered, behavior that seems irrational and ineffective suddenly becomes stunningly sensible and masterful - but unfortunately, on behalf of a goal that conflicts with what the organization and even the employee are trying to achieve, (Oreg 2002).

The above discussion concurs with a survey carried out by Management Advisory Committee (1999) which found that 65% of older employees and 41% of younger employees reported that work related changes contributed to their desire to leave the Public Services earlier than they intended. The committee noted that both younger and older employees rated all workplace changes as being important although younger employees placed higher importance on average than mature aged employees and senior Austrian Public Services employees.

In his study of 405 employees from Ministry of Defense and National Policy Agency, Ming-Chu Yu (2009) concluded that 80.5% of the young employees aged between 25 and 40 years were leaving the organization due to lack of developing opportunities since there were no underlined change activities in the organizations. 77% of the respondents were man aged between 25 and 55 years of age.

Judson (1991) counter argue and posits that it is very difficult for an infant or young child to forgo immediate gratification for others that might come later on. The natural reaction of any child to such changes is to resist them. Judson (1991) further states that it should not be surprising then that each person tends to develop in early years some suspicion and distrust of any form of change. Unpleasant memories of these significant childhood changes and of the associated feelings of suspicion and distrust tend to persist even when it comes to organizational change resulting in resistance.

Attner (1983) cited in Guest (1997) notes that all employees are suspicious about the unfamiliar and naturally concerned about how they will get from the old to the new, especially if it involves learning something new and risking failure resulting in resistance of old employees since they are not bold enough to take risk in a bid to protect their current status (Dunks. 2000).

Morris and Venkatesh (2000) cited in Robbins (2003) found that age had an important effect on various factors in technology adoption and that younger and older employees differ in their attitude towards technological change (Smith. 1994). Studies in psychology suggest that older workers' under-confidence may be part of the explanation of such attitude difference. Experiments show that compared to what they actually know, older workers underestimate their knowledge in the domain of computers (Jabri, 1997). Dunks (2000) highlights that most technological change activities are accompanied by a form of training to enable employees adjust to new situations and the older workers in particular, when it comes to studying and learning, some believe its too late for them to learn new things and as a result they resist the change (Judson. 1991).

Dunks (2000) states that change often takes place so rapidly that individuals feel unable to cope and adjust to events. Older workers in particular may be psychologically incapable of accepting radical change. Judson (1991) notes that feelings of trust and loyalty between two individuals are first formed by the way they interact, but these feelings become firmly established only after a series of incidents prove that the manager or fellow worker really is to be trusted.

Maaja (2004) argues that different age groups may have different understanding and perspective concerning the process of change. Burnes (1996) postulates that change can be seen by some people as devaluing their

previous experience which may explain why younger people who have invested less time and effort in learning the old ways find it easier to adapt to the new ways.

Maaja (2004) studied 906 employees from Estonian companies in order to explore how task-oriented and relationship orientation of organizational culture influence attitudes to the process of organizational change among employees in post-socialist organization. Maaja (2004) concluded that 62% of the young people without any significant work experience from the Soviet times found change more necessary. He further noted that 52% of the middle age employees were least influenced by relationships. 62% of the people older than 35 years rely on relationships. 72% of the young colleagues proved to be independent decision makers. He also noted that 52% of old members proved not to support organizational goals as compared to 63% of the young members.

In his research of 137 Estonian companies, Alas and Sharifi (2002) found that 90% had made transformational change and 61% changed their organizational culture. He noted different attitudes towards change among the Estonian managers during the implementation of change. Alas and Sharifi (2002) concluded that 59% of young managers supported change from the onset and 52% of the old managers started to give maximum support after realizing the benefits of change.

After his research of 58 lecturers from International Islamic University in Malaysia, Galangar (2004) concluded that there is a positive correlation between age and resistance to organizational change. He found that 63% of the lecturers of age above 35 years were reluctant to implement new program at the institution. This concurs with results of a survey carried out in Poland by Dobosz and Jankowisc (2002) where it was found that 62% of the English managers complained about difficulties with changing people who are older and more traditional. They found that young people. 65% of the young people were keen to lead all change activities within the organization.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed a case study approach in order to collect data. The research adopted a case study research design in which both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used. The case study was chosen because the researchers had insufficient funds to carry out a census of all the registered cotton processing companies in Zimbabwe. The approach allowed the researchers to concentrate on a real scenario, thus proffering solutions to any business that may want to use the stated findings for improving a real situation. Researchers find it possible to give their own judgments and opinions since they were actually interacting with the participants under study.

Permission to carry out the research at Gokwe Cotton Company (COTTCO) was granted by the station's human resources manager. Appointments with respondents were made by letters and through the telephone where applicable. The researcher hand-delivered and collected the questionnaires from the sample elements on the same day. Im-prompt interviews afforded the researchers the privilege to read facial expressions of respondents and their body language.

### Study Site

The case study was conducted at Gokwe Cotton Company (COTTCO) in Zimbabwe. The COTTCO in Gokwe was chosen because, just like the Harare headquarters, it houses all the information pertaining to all employees of COTTCO in Zimbabwe. It was also a convenient study site since one of the researchers was employed at the organisation during the study and therefore access to vital information was easy.

### Sampling Method

Using stratified random sampling, the researcher divided the employees into two segments, that is, for management and for general workers. The researchers used 75 per cent of management and 35 per cent of general workers. The researchers used these percentages due to the size of segments and the fact that they are both above the recommended 10 per cent of their respective populations (Best and Khan: 2003). A total sample of 60 employees, out of a total population of 120 employees was selected. From a population of 20 managers, 15 names were picked making up the sample for managers. The same process was repeated for a population segment of 100 general employees from which 45 names were picked for the sample of general workers. However, from the 15 selected managers, 13 managed to respond to the questionnaire while 42 general workers out of the 45 selected general workers also responded to the questionnaire. This effectively resulted in a usable sample of 55 employees.

Details of the sample are shown in table 1 below:

**Table1. Sample details**

Staff level	Population (N)	Selected sample	Usable sample (n)
Management (Top and Middle)	20	15	13
General workers	100	45	42
Total	120	60	55

### Data collection instruments

The research instruments used in this research were formal questionnaires and key informant interviews. Questionnaires were used as appropriate research tools to reveal sensitive issues which respondents would otherwise feel uncomfortable to talk about in an interview. A pre-test survey was conducted in order to evaluate the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Questions that proved to be unclear to the respondents were modified, rephrased or discarded. Edwards (2003) posits that pretesting of instruments in the field can serve as a reality check indicating to the researcher how well conceptualization of the problem matches the actual experience of the practitioner. Key informant interviews were used because they give the interviewer room to adjust questions as necessary, clarify and ensure that the questions are properly understood by repeating or rephrasing them. Interviews also make it possible for the researcher to take note of non verbal clues from the respondents, for example, frowns and nervous tapping which can be used to determine the final result.

### Data entry and analysis

The data obtained was analyzed and classified into specific categories of data levels to allow determination of the type of presentations and statistical operations to be employed.

## RESULTS

The table below shows responses to suggested statements on the impact of age on resistance to change.

**Table 2. Responses to suggested statements (SS) on the impact of age on resistance to change.**

	AGE	SA	A	NS	D	SD	TOTAL FREQUENCY
SS1	≥35	31	0	5	60	4	100
SS1	<35	25	55	7	11	2	100
SS2	≥35	42	4	5	40	9	100
SS2	<35	43	28	18	6	5	100
SS3	≥35	33	27	10	20	10	100
SS3	<35	30	34	18	10	8	100
SS4	≥35	66	4	0	13	17	100
SS4	<35	27	10	8	49	6	100
SS5	≥35	66	30	0	3	1	100
SS5	<35	10	45	30	4	11	100

Source of data: Raw Data

Key: SS on the impact of age on resistance to change

SS1: Organisational change is important to the organization.

SS2: Employee age determine the extent of resistance to change.

SS3: Change is supported when it involves learning new things.

SS4: Old committed employees support change.

SS5: Labour turnover among young employees increases if change programmes are not implemented.

**Key: Responses to SS**

SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree; NS: Not Sure; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree

## Analysis of table 2

The majority (68%) of the respondents above 35 years disagree that organizational change is important for the organization while 80% of the respondents below the age of 35 thought otherwise. On the statement that age determine the extent of resistance to change, an overwhelmingly 71% of those below 35 years and 46 of those above 35 years agreed with the statement with as big as 43% of the respondents strongly agreeing to it. However, 5% of the respondents below 35years strongly disagree with the suggested statement. On SS3, the majority (64%) of the respondents below 35 years are in favor of the statement, while on the other hand only 60% of the respondents above 35 years also agree with the statement. On SS4, 64% of the respondents above 35 years at old committed employees support change and 42 % of respondents below the age of 35 years also support the statement while 55% of respondents below the age of 35 were against the statement donations. On SS5 (96%) of those above the age of 35 and 55% of those below the age of 35 agree with suggested statement.

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The table indicates that the majority (52%) of the respondents agree that organizational change is important to COTTCO with a total of 28% strongly agreeing to the assertion. Out of the 28% of employees who strongly agree to the assertion, 25% of them are below 35 years. This finding is in agreement with Alas and Sharifi (2002) findings who concluded that 59% of young employees supported change from the onset in his research of 137 Estonian companies. This result suggests that older members of organizations do not support organizational change as much as younger members. This finding is also consistent with a study in Poland, where an English manager complained about difficulties with changing people who are older and more traditional (Dobosz and Jankowicz, 2002). In line with this, the Management Advisory Committee (1999) concluded that both younger and older employees rated all workplace changes as being important although younger employees placed higher importance on average than mature aged employees and senior Austrian Public Services employees in their research.

The table also indicates that 64 % of younger employees support the notion that change is supported when it involves learning new things and availability of promotional prospects, while 30% of those under the age of 35 were against the statement. An overwhelming percent of 55 and 96 of younger and older employees respectively support the statement SS5 and only 4% of younger employees were against the statement. This concurs with the results of personal interviews conducted where almost two-thirds of those below 35 years indicated that most of their young colleagues are leaving the organization citing lack of opportunities and promotional prospects within the organization since there has been no form of any organizational change for the last decade. This finding corroborates the conclusions of Management Advisory Committee (1999), who found that 65% of older employees and 41% of younger employees reported that work related changes contributed to their desire to leave the Public Services earlier than they intended. This is also consisted with Walker (1994) who reported that in an interview with an employee in his early thirties, he noted that the employee had eventually become bored with his job and that there were a few opportunities for change for him in the organization as a result he wished to look for a job outside the organization.

The responses from statement 2 and 4 show that majority of young employees support the statement 2 while the minorities of young employees are against statement 4. Results from the interviews indicates that they agree to statement 2 citing that the older the employee the more the resistance. The majority of young employees disagree with the statement 4 and they argue that even if the older employee is committed they will not support change. This supports the findings of Galangar (2004) who found that 63% of the lecturers of age above 35years were reluctant to implement new program at the institution. He concluded that there is a positive correlation between age and resistance to organizational change.

## FINDINGS

The purpose of the research was to find the impact of age on employee's resistance to organizational change. The study found that older members of the organization do not support organizational change as much as their young colleagues in the organization. There is a positive relationship between age and resistance to organizational change that is the older one becomes the more resistant to organizational change. Older employees of the organization do not support organizational change which involves learning new things. The study also found a positive relationship between employee commitment and positive attitude to change.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research findings show that employees above 35 years of age are the most resistant age group within an organization. It was also observed that change activities are immediately and willingly accepted if they are beneficial to people and change which is detrimental to people get adverse reactions and people make all efforts to resist it.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researchers would like to acknowledge the patience and dedication of COTTCO employees who participated in this research. Special thanks also go to the COTTCO Human Resources Manager, General Manager and Transport and Logistic Manager without them our work would have been a mammoth task to perform.

## REFERENCE

- Abramson, J.H., (1990). *Survey Methods in Community Medicine*. 4th edition: Churchill- Livingstone . London
- Alas, R. and Sharifi, S., (2002). *Organizational Learning and Resistance to Change*. Wesley Publishing Company. London.
- Beer, M. and Eisenstat, R., Spector, B., (1990)., *Why Change Programs Don't Produce Change*, Harvard Business Review. Boston.
- Benton, A., (1998). *The change function*, McGraw-Hill Book Company. New York.
- Best, J. W and Khan, J. V., (1993). *Research in education*, Pitman. Boston.
- Burnes, B., (1996). *Managing Change: Strategic approach to organizational dynamics*, Pitman, London.
- Bovey, W. and Hede, A., (2001). *Resistance to organizational change: The role of cognitive and affective processes*, British Industrial Society, London.
- Bradley, B., (2000). *Managing transitions: Making the most of change*. Wesley Publishing Company. London.
- Cameron, K.S., (1993). *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundation of a new discipline*. San Francisco.
- Creswell, J. W., (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks.
- Center for Applied Research in Educational Technology. (2005). *CARET: Definition of study types*. Prentice Hall, London.
- Coetsee, L., (1999). *From resistance to commitment: Public Administration Quarterly*.
- Cook, P., and Campbell, W., (1979). *Research methods in business*, Personnel Review. London.
- Cordery, J., Sevastos, P., Mueller, W. and Parker, S., (1993). *Correlates of employee attitude toward functional flexibility*, Prentice Hall, London
- Darwish, Y., (2000). *Organizational commitment and job satisfaction*, Personnel Review, London.
- Denzin, N., (1984). *The research act: Englewood Cliffs*, Prentice Hall, London.
- Dent, E., & Goldberg, S., (1999). *Challenging resistance to change*, University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill.
- De Jager, P., (2001). *Resistance to change: a new view of an old problem*. The Futurist, California.
- Dobosz, D., and Jankowicz, A.D., (2002). *Knowledge Transfer of the Western Concept of Quality* Penguin Books. Harmondsworth.
- Dunks, S., (2000). *Organizational Behavior*, Prentice Hall. London.
- Feagin, J., Orum, A., and Sjoberg, G. (1991). *A case for case study*. University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill.
- Folger, R., and Skarlicki, D., (1999). *Unfairness and resistance to change: Hardship as mistreatment*, Penguin Books. Harmondsworth.
- Galangar, S.M., (2008). *Resistance to change*, H.U.M, New Delhi
- Gall, M.D., and Gall, J. P., (2007). *Discussing cultural studies in critical theory research*, Penguin Business. London.
- Gay, S., (1996). *The journey of a beginning researcher: The Qualitative Report*, Chapel-Hill.
- Guest, D., (1997). *Human resource management and industrial relations*, Pearson. Upper Saddle River.
- Gibson, G and Keith, B., (2004). *Human problem solving*, Prentice Hall. Englewood Cliffs.
- Handy, C.B., (1985). *Understanding Organizations*, 3rd edition, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.
- Hitchcock, I and Hughes, B., (1993). *Presentation research data in business*, Pitman. London.
- Hunt, D., and Osborn, A., (1994). *Understanding and managing organizational behavior (5th edition.)*. Pearson. Upper Saddle River.
- International Programme on the Elimination of Child labour (IPEC), (1996) number 15 part 1.

- Iverson, R.D., (1996). Employee acceptance of organizational change: The role of organizational commitment, Pitman. London.
- Iverson, R.D., and Roy, D., (1994). "A causal model of behavioral commitment, Harvard Business Review. Harvard.
- Jabri, B., (1997). Managing Resistance, Pitman, London.
- Judson, H., (1991). Strategic approach to organizational dynamics, Pitman, London.
- Kegan, R., and Lahey, L., (2001). The real reason people won't change. Harvard Business Review. Harvard.
- King, J., and Kraemer, K., (1985). The dynamics of computing. Columbia University Press. New York.
- Kotter, J. P., and Schlesinger, L.A., (1979). Choosing strategies for change. Harvard Business Review.
- Krefting, L., (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. The American Journal of Occupational Therapy.
- Labour Relations Act Chapter 28:01. (2002) Revised Edition, Print flow, Harare
- Lau, C., and Woodman, R.C., (1995). Understanding organizational change: A schematic perspective, Columbia University Press. New York.
- Leedy, A., and Ormrod, H., (2001). Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods: Sage Publications.
- Levy, S., (1988). Information technologies in universities, Flagstaff. Northern Arizona University,
- Loehlin, J., (1992). Latent variable models, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Hillsdale.
- Maaja, V., (2004). Organizational culture and Values, Research areas. Tartu University.
- Management Advisory Committee. (1999). Organizational Renewal, APSC. Australia.
- Milne, J., (1999). Centre for CBL in Land Use and Environmental Sciences, Aberdeen University.
- Ming-Chu Yu, A., (2009). Public Personnel Management, McGraw-Hill. New York.
- Moser, C.A., and Kalton, G., (1989). Survey Methods in Social Investigation. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Gower Publishing Company. London.
- Myers, M., (2000). Qualitative research and the generalisability question: Standing firm with Proteus. The Qualitative Report. London.
- Nadler, D.A., and Tushman, M.L., (1995). Types of Organizational Change: From Incremental Improvement to Discontinuous Transformation. Prentice Hall. International.
- Oreg, R., (2002). Organizational culture, Prentice Hall. New Delhi.
- Paul, B., (2000). Research studies, financial times. London.
- Pyecha, J., (1988). A case study of the application of non-categorical special education in two states. Research Triangle Institute. Chapel Hill.
- Robbins, S.P., (2003). Organizational Behavior, Prentice Hall, New Delhi.
- Saunders, M., (2003). Research Methods for business studies, Financial Times, London.
- Shulteworth, M., (2008). Research methods, Prentice Hall, London.
- Smith, E. R., (1994). Procedural knowledge and processing strategies in social cognition. Handbook of social cognition. Research Triangle Institute. Hillsdale.
- Stainback, J., and Stainback, H., (1988), Qualitative research methods, Prentice Hall New Delhi.
- Stake, R., (1995). The art of case research. Sage Publications, Newbury Park.
- Steiner, G.S., (1979). Strategic Management, the Free Press. California.
- Thompson, D., (1999). The Oxford Dictionary of current English, Mackays PLC Great Britain
- Trochim, W., (1989). Outcome pattern matching and program theory. Evaluation and Program Planning. Sage Publications Newbury Park.
- VanDulen, T., (1979). Research Designs, Mackays plc. Great Britain.
- Walker, A., (1999). Human Resources Planning, McGraw-Hill Book Company. New York.
- Waters, J., (1997). Research Design, Purcell Way, North Vancouver, Canada.
- Wegner, R., (1998). Qualitative Research Methods, Prentice Hall. London.
- Weik, E., (2001). Myths in Transforming Process, International Studies of Management & Organization, Prentice Hall, London
- Yin, R., (1984). Case study research: Design and methods (1st edition.). Sage Publishing. Beverly Hills, CA.
- Yin, R. K., (1984). Case study research: Design and methods. Sage Publishing. Beverly Hills, CA.
- Yin, R., (1989). Case study research: Design and methods (Revised edition.). Sage Publishing, Newbury Park.
- Yin, R., (1993). Applications of case study research. Sage Publishing. Newbury Park.
- Yin, R., (1994). Case study research: Design and methods (2nd edition.). Sage Publishing. Thousand Oaks.