

Understanding And Managing Resistance To Change

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Resistance is a natural response to change; it's recognising and managing that resistance which is a key skill to be an effective change manager.

Resistance is to be expected throughout a change process as many people are averse to change, especially when there are personal reasons for this. Managing resistance effectively is vital to any change process as ignoring resistance runs the risk of having people undermine all your hard work.

How People Process Change

Change is applied and processed by people in completely different ways. There are four dominant change styles that people have when trying to introduce change – Enthusiastic, Imaginative, Practical and Logical. People fit into these four stages differently, and a style that works for one person won't necessarily work for everyone. When someone is opposed to change, they tend to process through stages of shock, denial, anger, helplessness and finally, acceptance. It's important to understand these stages and where your staff may sit across them. Successful change management relies on consistent communication, full and active leadership and employee involvement and support. So, make sure to open channels of communication with your employee's, even if they are opposed. You must understand where they are coming from before you can win their involvement and support.

Recognising Resistance to Change

Resistance to change isn't as obvious as one may think. Of course, there are people who outright tell you they don't agree with your plans and make it difficult for you to see them though. More often though, resistance is less obvious and it's this resistance that is harder to manage as it often goes unnoticed until it is too late. Silent resistance can weaken the change initiative through group discussion when the change leader isn't around, forming an opposing group. Or, silent resistance can occur when people are simply far too busy to implement changes. Whatever the resistance it's important to acknowledge and deal with it, but how?

Reducing Resistance by Updating Your Decision-Making Process

1. Consensus decision making should ensure that each member has the opportunity to provide input and give their opinion.
2. Each team affected by the ultimate decision needs to be involved – i.e. one person representing that team needs to be in the decision-making process.
3. All of the issues with the initiative need to be identified and discussed.
4. A range of alternative solutions should be evaluated before the group decides on any single course of action.
5. A decision should be made once the choices have been narrowed down to one approach which can be adapted until everyone agrees.
6. Members need to develop strategies together for communicating the merits of the decision to those who were not involved in the process but will be affected by it.
7. Implementation must be monitored to ensure compliance with what was agreed.

How to Deal with Resistance to Change

- **Recognise resistance.** Don't pretend it's not happening - it will not go away but will quietly fester and grow to be much bigger than it really is.
- **Don't shoot the messenger.** Just because someone has spoken out, don't assume they are the only one resisting - there may be many more quietly agreeing with them.
- **Open it up for discussion.** Often easier said than done but if you recognise resistance, then ask questions and find out about it. Listen to what people say. Don't think about whether you agree or disagree with them, just listen to them and what they have to say.
- **Give it some time.** Allow time for the concerns to be raised and then work with your team to find shared solutions.
- **Understand their concerns.** Try to understand what might be really worrying them. Does your plan have some real weaknesses? Could their concerns have some basis? Are they worried about their own capacity or skills? Whilst they might not want to admit it, is it possible that they feel they don't have the ability or knowledge necessary? Or are they going to lose status? Or control?
- **Motivation and resistance to change.** Key to managing resistance is understanding motivation. For each member of your team think about what their motivation might be, how this will be affected by the change and how you might revise your change plans accordingly.

Contact Us

Let's talk you through your needs and how we can best assist you.

Give us a call directly on one of our office numbers, or email us, and we'll get back to you quickly and responsively.

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