Dealing with Resistance to Change

by Steve Bell, Insights Client Relationship Manager

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It is often taken for granted that organisations, large or small, need to change in order to stay competitive. In business, it is the one thing you can be assured of. There is no choice, they must change to survive. When dealing with this much change though, we are bound to run into barriers of resistance. In this article, we look at strategies to help overcome these resistances to change.

There are many different types of organisational change. Organisations can change their strategy, their use of technology, structure or culture or any combination of these. Understanding how the organisation is going to change, and how this will affect the people involved, makes it much easier to plan on how to make that change happen and what barriers may arise.

The implementation phase has an important political dimension. It needs to address the extent to which people are ready for, and accepting of change, and whether the process threatens them in any way. People issues at all levels are paramount to successful change, and these must be addressed continually at all stages of change. In order to effectively manage the implementation process of change as a manager, it is important to be aware of reasons why people might resist changes and find ways of encouraging their cooperation. Resistance can delay or slow down the change process, obstruct its implementation and increase its cost.

So why do people resist change?

There are four essential reasons why people resist change.

1. **Self-interest:** People fear the effect that change will have on them.

2. **Misunderstanding and lack of trust:** People fear that management do not have their best interests at heart. This is about good communication.

3. **Different opinion:** Stakeholders may not always agree that those who are initiating change are doing the right thing or at least going about resolving a problem in the right way. Resistance for this reason however, may well highlight issues that have not properly been considered.

4. **Low tolerance for change:** This is about people's ability to change, and going through the transition successfully.

Strategies for overcoming resistance

If new initiatives seem to fizzle out before they get going, and best laid plans go nowhere, these are signs that your team is resisting change. While not all resistance is bad, a failure to adapt and change in the business world can have disastrous consequences. Research has shown that about 70% of change in an organisation fails because of resistance from the workforce.

So what can you do to deal with resistance to change?

Link the change to other issues people care about

- To increase the perceived need for a change, link it to other issues that people already care about. By showing how change is connected to other things that are already in the front of people's minds, for example, job security, you can make a change less likely to be replaced as new demands for their attention show up.

Show you care and understand concerns

- Create a way to communicate with employees about new initiatives and their progress. Ask them what their concerns are when describing the vision behind the changes. Demonstrating that you value their views is the first step to influencing them.

Identify members of the team who support the change

- These people are your advocates for new ways of working. They are also peers who speak the same language as their fellow team members. Give them a platform and ensure they participate in forums about the change so that their voices can be heard.

Open conversation

- Build in as much certainty as you can by giving information on what is going to happen and when, what aspects will change and what will stay the same. People are more likely to become stressed when they don't feel in control. When people don't know the details, they assume the worst possible outcome. Share details freely and ask for input on the ones that aren't yet defined.

Offer resources

- When change occurs, one of the biggest barriers is that employees tend to be unprepared to handle the changes. Provide training classes, equipment, anything that will not only help them to adapt, but also to excel in the changed environment. Help them in any way you can to be more efficient and effective employees before, during and after the changes take place. They may not only stop resisting, but actually feel encouraged and hopeful anytime thereafter that you make changes.

Timing is everything

- Good timing is crucial when it comes to change, and if you try to implement major changes all at once or too quickly, your employees may be more likely to resist. Introduce change in measured doses when possible, to give employees a chance to acclimatise. Not only does this ensure the least amount of interruption to your business, but also it makes for happier, and thereby more productive employees.

Looking to the future

It's a cliché, but it's true that change is hard. While you might find that even your most loyal employees put up resistance when it comes to change in the workplace, by following some simple best practice strategies and a well thought out plan, you can ensure your team members that while things may be changing, you are just as committed to their overall success as ever before.

About the author

Steve Bell, Insights Client Relationship Manager
Steve's career with Insights started in January 2014. Prior to joining the organisation he spent four and a half years with SHL working with their strategic clients to understand their business and challenges. Prior to his career in the world of personal development, Steve worked across several different sectors from banking through to engineering and information technology – motivated by helping others achieve their goals.

Driven by his personal experience of the power of development, Steve understands the importance of individuals being given the opportunity to excel, an opportunity to understand and demonstrate their full potential.

At Insights, Steve works with a small portfolio of clients to understand their business goals and shape the use of Insights solutions, helping his clients to maximise their returns and deliver maximum impact across the organisation. Steve sits at wheel position 21.