

## **ELEMENTS OF CHANGE**

### **7. RESISTANCE TO CHANGE**

#### **7.1. Resistance to Change - Workplace**

What is resistance to change in the workplace and how does it manifest itself? Resistance to change is the act of opposing or struggling with modifications or transformations that alter the status quo in the workplace. Managing resistance to change is challenging. Resistance to change can be covert or overt, organized or individual. Employees can realize that they don't like or want a change and resist publicly and verbally. Or, they can just feel uncomfortable and resist, sometimes unknowingly, through the actions they take, the words they use to describe the change, and the stories and conversations they share in the workplace.

However resistance to change happens, it threatens the success of your venture. Resistance affects the speed at which an innovation is adopted. It affects the feelings and opinions of employees at all stages of the adoption process. It affects productivity, quality, and relationships. How do you spot resistance to change? Listen to the gossip and observe the actions of employees. Note whether employees are missing meetings related to the change. Late assignments, forgotten commitments, and absenteeism can all be signs of resistance to change. Something as simple as listening to how employees talk about the change in meetings and hall conversations can reveal a lot about resistance.

Some employees will publicly challenge the change, the need for the change, or how the change is unfolding. The more powerful the resisting employee, in terms of job title, position, and longevity, the more success he or she will have with resistance. Less well-positioned employees may resist collectively through organizations such as a union. Resistance to change appears in action such as verbal criticism, nitpicking details, failure to adopt, snide comments, sarcastic remarks, missed meetings, failed commitments, interminable arguments, lack of support verbally, and outright sabotage. Resistance to change can intensify if employees feel that they have been involved in a series of changes that have had insufficient support to gain the anticipated results. They become change weary when this year's flavor of the month is quality. Last year's was continuous improvement and employee involvement and teams. This year it's a focus on serving internal customers and three years ago, employees were asked to adopt a

new management structure. Resistance is intensified because, not only do you need to gain support for the current change, which employees may or may not see in their best interests, you need to justify the former change and the need to change again.

## **7.2. Reacting to Change & Realizing the Costs**

In times of change, the natural reaction is to resist. Whether they are happening at home, in the community or in the workplace - changes introduce the unknown. They take us out of a place we know and are comfortable with and force us into something new. We do not know what to expect, and we anticipate hardships and struggles as we leave the current state.

Teams introducing change in an organization should not be surprised by resistance. In fact, they should anticipate resistance and work to mitigate the consequences of that resistance. Resistance cannot be totally eradicated, but it can be managed constructively, proactively and before the project or the people in the organization are impacted. Resistance to change does not come without a cost. Most organizations have countless stories of the negative and unintended consequences of resistance to change. Resistance is not merely a nuisance; it has meaningful and costly consequences. Some costs of resistance include:

- **Project delays**
- **Objectives missed**
- **Productivity declines**
  - **Absenteeism**
- **Loss of valued employees**

While resistance is sometimes viewed as a "soft" issue, each of the costs of resistance listed above can have significant financial consequences on the projects and change efforts going on in your organization. Managing resistance to change is critical to the success of the changes you are introducing in the new year.

In an organization that has a culture of trust; transparent communication; involved, engaged employees; and positive interpersonal relationships, resistance to change is easy to see and also much less likely to occur. Employees feel free to tell their boss what they think and to have open exchanges with managers. When a change is introduced in this environment, with a lot of discussion and employee

involvement, resistance to change is minimized. Resistance is also minimized if there is a wide-spread belief that a change is needed.

### **7.3. Managing the Change Process**

Regardless of the many types of organizational change, the critical aspect is a company's ability to win the buy-in of their organization's employees on the change. Effectively managing organizational change is a four step process:

- 1. Recognizing the changes in the broader business environment**
- 2. Developing the necessary adjustments for their company's needs**
- 3. Training their employees on the appropriate changes**
- 4. Winning the support of the employees with the persuasiveness of the appropriate adjustments**

As a multidisciplinary practice that has evolved as a result of scholarly research, organizational change management should begin with a systematic diagnosis of the current situation in order to determine both the need for change and the capability to change. The objectives, content, and process of change should all be specified as part of a Change Management plan.

Change management processes should include creative marketing to enable communication between changing audiences, as well as deep social understanding about leadership's styles and group dynamics. As a visible track on transformation projects, Organizational Change Management aligns groups' expectations, communicates, integrates teams and manages people training. It makes use of performance metrics, such as financial results, operational efficiency, leadership commitment, communication effectiveness, and the perceived need for change to design appropriate strategies, in order to avoid change failures or resolve troubled change projects.

Successful change management is more likely to occur if the following are included:

1. Benefits management and realization to define measurable stakeholder aims, create a business case for their achievement (which should be continuously updated), and monitor assumptions, risks, dependencies, costs, return on investment, disbenefits and cultural issues affecting the progress of the associated work

2. Effective communication that informs various stakeholders of the reasons for the change (why?), the benefits of successful implementation (what is in it for us, and you) as well as the details of the change (when? where? who is involved? how much will it cost? etc.)
3. Devise an effective education, training and/or skills upgrading scheme for the organization
4. Counter resistance from the employees of companies and align them to overall strategic direction of the organization
5. Provide personal counseling (if required) to alleviate any change-related fears
6. Monitoring of the implementation and fine-tuning as required

#### **7.4. Tactics for Neutralizing Resistance to Change**

One of the biggest mistakes you can make is to treat the symptom, not the cause. This is especially true when dealing with resistance to change in an organizational setting. Treating the symptom is ineffective because it does not fix what is broken. Additionally, treating only the symptom can actually further aggravate those who are resisting the change. Instead of addressing their objection, you further frustrate them.

ADKAR, an individual change model, is an effective tool for identifying the root cause of resistance. It breaks successful change down in to the key building blocks of **A**wareness, **D**esire, **K**nowledge, **A**bility and **R**einforcement. When a change is not taking hold and there is resistance, ADKAR can be used to focus in on why the resistance is happening. Is the resistance caused by a lack of awareness of the need for change? Is it a result of no desire to change? Is it caused by lack of knowledge, or a fear of not having the knowledge to be successful once the change is in place? Are there barriers to ability that are resulting in the resistance? Or, is a lack of reinforcement causing the resistance?

Change management practitioners and the "real" resistance managers can use ADKAR to understand and manage the root cause of resistance. In recent benchmarking studies, the number one reason cited by participants for employees resistance was lack of awareness of the need for change. A lack of awareness also showed up in the top five reasons managers resisted change in both studies. The moral of the story is this: in today's organizations you must make a compelling case for change. It is not enough to say "here is the change", you must clearly

illustrate the reasons for the change and the risks of not changing if you hope to get employees on board.

There are a couple of interesting connections related to the compelling case for change. The case for change shows up in the ADKAR Model in the first building block, Awareness. It is basic human nature to want the answer to "why" when we are asked to change. This is true for changes happening at home as well as changes happening at work. If we are left wondering why, we tend to hold back our support and buy-in. We begin resisting the change, not because we disagree with it, but because no one has convinced us why the change was happening in the first place. Second, in today's organizations where employees have been empowered, it is even more important to build a compelling case for change. Over the last twenty years, organizations have worked to push decision making, ownership and accountability deeper down in the organization. It is no surprise, then, that when we ask employees to "jump" their reaction is to ask "why" instead of "how high". New value systems have resulted in a more engaged workforce, but they have also affected how we must manage change.

Thus, the first step in engaging a workforce and in addressing the greatest cause for resistance is making a compelling case for change. When asked who employees want to hear the case for change from, participants in a recent benchmarking study overwhelmingly cited senior leaders as the preferred sender. You will need to work with senior leaders to ensure they are delivering effective communications about the need for change.

## **7.5. Engaging the “Real” Resistance Managers**

The "real" resistance managers are those who can listen to and engage resistant employees. This is not the project leader. It is not a member of the project team. It is not an HR professional and it is not the change management resource supporting a project. The real resistance managers are the supervisors and managers throughout your organization whose employees are impacted by the change. Unfortunately, the participants in the referenced benchmarking study also identified managers and supervisors as the most resistant group. This creates a dilemma for those introducing change. The people you need on board and involved in introducing the change and managing resistance may themselves be resistant. You must first manage the change with managers and supervisors before engaging them as agents of change with their direct reports. This means helping each of

them through the ADKAR change process - Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability and Reinforcement.

For many of your managers and supervisors, managing resistance is a new job role requiring skills and experience that have not been developed. It is not enough to tell managers that you need their help in managing resistance, you must provide them the training and tools they need to identify and manage resistance from their employees.

Finally it is important to address how we should be avoiding resistance in the first place. Most organizations experience a higher level of employee resistance than necessary because of one simple reason, they fail to manage the change with a structured process and dedicated resources for change management. This failure only results in a greater need for fire-fighting and damage control later on. So the first step for managing resistance is actually to implement effective change management at the onset of a project. If you do this, you will find that the adage “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is really true when it comes to change and managing resistance.