

Individual Resistance from Employees to Organizational Change

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ABSTRACT

Core competitiveness is the capability of a company to survive while facing strong competition, not only from inside the country but also from international corporations. Even small or medium businesses facing strong rivals typically must be able to make changes quickly to maintain their competitiveness. These kinds of organizational changes are not only small ones, like adding a new person or modifying a program at one department, but are often organization-wide changes. Resistance to both small and large change is one of the important factors that can influence the success of implementing any organizational change, including new technology innovations, new policies, and new organizational structure. In this paper, we will review the studies of resistance to change and research the theories of individual responses and resistance to change. It is important to understand the reaction of employee responses to change over time and to understand how to reduce resistance to change through managing change processes.

Keywords: organization change, resistance to change, individual respond.

INTRODUCTION

Core competitiveness is the capability of a company survive while facing strong competition, not only from inside the country but from international corporations. Even small or medium businesses facing strong rivals typically must be able to make changes quickly to maintain their competitiveness. These kinds of organizational changes are not only small changes, like adding a new person or modifying a program at one department, but are often organization-wide changes. Resistance to both small and large changes is one of the important factors that can influence the success of implementing any organizational change, including change in mission, restructuring operations, inputting new technologies, mergers, major collaborations, downsizing, new programs such as Total Quality Management, re-engineering, and new organizational structure. Organizational transformation may keep the company in business, but will employees understand it if it is a fundamental and radical reorientation in the new way the organization operates? Because of the likelihood of employee resistance, change should not be done for the sake of change but to accomplish some overall or specific goal.

Organizational change is usually provoked by some outside driving force, such as substantial cuts in funding, major new markets, a need for dramatic increases in productivity and/or services, or a strong new competitor in the market. Typically, organizations must undertake organization-wide change to evolve to a different level in their life cycle. Such changes might take the form of transition to a new chief executive, who can institute organization-wide change when his or her new and unique personality pervades the entire organization. Organization-wide change often goes against the values held by members of the organization—how members believe things should be done. Often, organization-wide change is difficult and provokes strong resistance because people are afraid of the unknown, they don't share a vision of the future, or they don't understand the need for change. Many are inherently cynical about change, particularly from hearing about the notion of "change" as if it's a mantra. Many doubt there are effective means in place with which to accomplish major organizational change. Often there are conflicting goals in the plan for organizational change, e.g., increasing resources to accomplish the change while cutting costs to remain viable. There are many discussions in the literature about resistance to change, focusing on how change requires the culture of the organization to change first, including changes in employees' values and beliefs and in the way they enact these values and beliefs.

In this paper, we will review the studies of resistance to change and research the theories of individual responses and resistance to change. It is important to understand the reaction of employee responses to change over time and to understand how to reduce resistance to change through managing change processes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Necessity for Organizational Change in Global Business

Adapting to changing goals and demands has become less of a challenge for organizations facing global competition, but the task seems to have become more complicated in terms of ensuring in advance that employees can handle the change. In the profit sector, global market share growth and political shifts have opened more new markets for products and services than ever before. To respond to the pace of change, organizations are adopting flatter and more responsive and agile structures and more empowering, team-oriented cultures. As a result, employees are coming to expect involvement in decisions about organizational change. Successful organizational adaptation is increasingly reliant on generating employee support and enthusiasm for proposed changes, rather than merely overcoming resistance.

Mintzberg and Waters (1985) pointed out the influence of participation on a set of dimensions related to the success of the implementation of deliberate strategic change. Participation is believed to have a number of positive effects on the strategy process; most notably, involvement of those affected by a change in strategy will reduce organizational resistance and create a higher level of psychological commitment among employees towards the proposed changes. Also, participation leads to qualitatively better strategic decisions (Kim and Mauborgne, 1998).

Why Employees Resist Change

Resistance to change has been recognized one of the important factors that can influence the success of organizational changes, including new technology innovation, new policies, and new organizational structure. Maurer (1996) indicated that half to two-thirds of all major corporate change efforts fail, and resistance is the little-recognized but critically important contributor to that failure.

Recent studies of resistance to change have focused on behavior reaction. Brower and Abolafia (1995) defined resistance as a particular kind of action or inaction, while Ashforth and Mael (1998) defined it as intentional acts of commission (defiance) or omission. Shapiro, Lewicki, and Devine (1995) noted that willingness to deceive authorities constitutes resistance to change, while Sagie, Elizur, and Greenbaum (1985) used compliant behavior as evidence of reduced resistance.

Although the concept of resistance to change has been well discussed, the concept has limitations. Jermier, Knights, & Nord (1994) argued that the interests of managers should not be privileged over the interests of workers when processing organizational change.

Block (1993) pointed out that resistance may occur when people distrust or have past resentments toward those leading the change and when they have different understandings or assessments of the situation. O'Toole (1995) reported that resistance to change is an effort to protect established social relations perceived to be threatened. Spector (1989) pointed out that resistance occurs because it threatens the status quo or increases the fear of and anxiety about real or imagined consequences (Morris and Raben, 1995). Bryant (2006) stated that change threatens personal security and confidence in an ability to perform. Moreover, change may also be resisted because it threatens the way people make sense of the world, calling into question their values and rationality and prompting some form of self-justification or defensive reasoning. Graham (1986) noted that some employee resistance to organizational actions is motivated by more than mere selfishness such as lack for future vision, short of capability, fear of relocation.

Managers in charge of rolling out a change initiative often blame others for the failure of the initiative, rather than accepting their role in its failure. Employees are likely to do the same thing, assigning blame for failed change attempts to their managers, rather than themselves (Argyris, 1990). Dealing successfully with resistance depends on an ability to represent the change accurately, to describe the source of resistance in the individual, and to choose and implement strategies appropriate for addressing and overcoming that source.

It is often assumed that everyone in an organization shares the same objective and homogeneous reality, but not all participants facing a change initiative encounter the same conditions. Differences in participant responses to change usually reflect either misunderstandings about the change or individual characteristics and attributes. Watson (1982) pointed out that managers often perceive resistance negatively, since they see employees who resist as disobedient; even

if they see employees who oppose change as short-term problems in processing the change, managers are tempted to treat their subordinates as obstacles.

Understanding the reasons for resistance to change can help managers prevent disaster and improve the change's chances for success. There are many reasons why employees may react negatively to change.

Personal loss. Right or wrong, people are afraid they will lose something, particularly:

- Security - a concern about job loss through a reduction in force or automation. .
- Money – a concern about loss of money through a reduction in salary, pay, benefits, or overtime or through increased expenses because of a move to another location that is farther from their home.
- Pride and satisfaction – a concern about ending up with jobs that no longer require their abilities and skills, such as automation through computer-aided design in engineering departments (e.g., a "button pusher" instead of a "skilled craftsman").
- Friends and important contacts – a concern that a move to another location will no longer allow contact with friends and important people, resulting in loss of visibility and daily contacts.
- Freedom – a concern that a new boss will replace confidence and personal freedom with closer supervision that provides less opportunity for decision-making.
- Responsibility – a concern that jobs will be reduced to menial tasks without responsibility.
- Authority – a concern about a loss of power and authority over other people because of a reorganization takes place or a new boss who decides to withdraw authority.
- Good working conditions – concern about being moved to a less desirable work location, e.g., from a large private office to a small one or from an office to a desk in a partitioned work area.
- Status – concern about loss of job title, responsibility, or authority that will result in a loss of status and recognition from others, such as when another layer of management is inserted between a subordinate and his or her manager.

No need. This type of resistance is epitomized by a reaction such as "What's the matter with the way things are now?" or "I don't see any reason why we should change."

More harm than good. This kind of resistance occurs when people feel the change is a mistake that it will cause more problems. Although sometimes this reaction is justified, it is particularly common when people at the lower levels of an organization feel that top management makes changes without knowing what's going on "down on the line."

Lack of respect. When people have a lack of respect and/or negative attitude toward the person or department responsible for making the change, there is a strong tendency to resent and resist the change because their feelings don't allow them to look at the change objectively.

Poor communication. Sometimes change is ordered in such a way that the people resent and resist it, simply because they don't like being told what to do. The emphatic command "Do it!" and/or an authoritarian tone can create emotions that would not have occurred if the communication had been more positive. This feeling can also occur if people are told what to do but not told why.

Negative attitude. People with a negative attitude toward the organization, the job, and/or the boss are very apt to resent or resist change, no matter what it is. This is one of the reasons why high morale is so important.

No input. This kind of resistance occurs when people who feel they should have been asked were not asked for their ideas concerning the change.

Perception of criticism. Whether or not the change is actually criticizing the things that were previously done or the way in which they were done, people may look upon the change as a personal criticism. For example, a person who has developed a certain system or procedure will very likely take it personally if someone wants to change it.

Creation of burden. Some changes add more work and, with it, confusion, mistakes, and other negative results. The initial stages of automation and computerization for example, can result in additional problems at first. If the change will obviously require more effort with little accomplished as a result, people are apt to resent and even resist it, particularly if no rewards accompany the extra effort.

Bad timing. The timing of a change is very important to its acceptance. If it comes at a time when people are already having problems, the change is usually resented and probably resisted by those who are supposed to implement

it. If, for example, a subordinate is in the process of making a schedule change that had been ordered by the boss, the subordinate would resent and probably resist another schedule change that the boss might request or order.

Challenge to authority. Some people are testing their power and influence by simply refusing to implement a change.

Secondhand information. Some people are very sensitive about the way they learn of the change. If they found out about it from a secondhand source, they might resist it until they hear it "from the horse's mouth."

Managers often have difficulty in determining the real reason why subordinates resent or resist a change. They may feel that the subordinates are just being stubborn or selfish, when the real reason may be entirely different and even fully justified.

Why People Accept or Welcome Change

While some people resent and/or resist change, others accept and welcome it. The degree to which these opposites occur depends on many factors. Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton (1998) indicated that one reason is that employees accept change in order to get top management to pay attention to issues that employees believe must be addressed in order for the organization to maintain high performance. Porter and Lawler (1968) suggested that how much effort an individual will expend in accepting change is determined by expectations that an outcome may be attained and the degree of value placed on the outcome in the person's mind; thus, employees may accept or welcome change when they see a clear benefit to doing so. Therefore, a person's attitude towards change comes from his or her perception of the outcomes of a change, compared with the individual's goals and values. Reasons for a positive reaction to change, then, include:

- *Personal gain.* When changes are made, some people may gain such things as new job titles, more responsibility, more money, and more authority. In short, they may stand to gain any of the things the loss of which would lead to change resistance. More security – a perception of greater security in a job, perhaps because more of personal skills will be used, such as when there is a change in an engineering department to computer-aided design and an individual feels more effective working with computers than using a pen to design on a drafting board.
- More income – a hope for a salary increase, more benefits, an incentive, or profit-sharing program, or more overtime.
- More authority – a hope for promotion to a position of greater authority, or a new boss who allows more authority than was available under the previous boss.
- More status/prestige – a hope for a new title, a new office, or a special assignment that carries with it status and prestige.
- More responsibility – a hope for a job change that provides new responsibility, or a new boss who assigned more responsibility than the previous one did.
- Better working conditions – a hope for a new work schedule, new equipment, or other conditions that make the job easier or more enjoyable.
- Increased personal satisfaction – a hope for a greater feeling of achievement because of a chance to use their abilities more to eliminate some of the obstacles that had stood in the way of personal performance.
- Better personal contacts – an expectation of being moved to a place with greater opportunity for contact with and visibility to influential people.
- A new challenge – the expectation of more rewarding work.

Less time and effort. Another reason why change may be welcome is if the change actually makes the job easier and requires less time and effort. For example, work simplification programs carry the slogan "Work smarter, not harder," and changes that can actually deliver on this promise are often welcomed. It can reduce the physical effort required to do the job.

Respect for the source. If people have a positive attitude toward the person or the department from which the change comes, they will be more likely to accept and even welcome the change.

Effective communication. People who are asked to do things instead of told to do them may react very positively, as are those who perceive they have had some input into effecting the change.

CONCLUSION: RETHINKING RESISTANCE

To Change from Individual Respondents

The intention of this paper is not to provide the answers to the complicated problems associated with resistance but to point out that the theoretical understanding of resistance is well documented. However, continued corporate failure in change efforts indicates that this knowledge has not impacted common perceptions of management and, therefore, has not transferred into the development of solid resistance-management techniques when implementing innovation.

Not everyone resists change, and not everyone accepts change. To what degree change is accepted depends on the specific change and individual conditions and perceptions. Acceptance or rejection often depends on the personal loss or gain that will result from the change in the tangible areas of , for example, money, visibility, working conditions, authority, or responsibility, as well as from intangibles including status, recognition, feeling of importance, and security. Although expected losses or gains may occur and others may never materialize, acceptance or resistance will depend to a large extent on what people expect will happen.

Management should know that resistance will always be a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that will profoundly affect the outcomes of change, both negatively and positively. Although research has provided a solid understanding of resistance and the benefits that can accrue to an organization through its proper change implementation to reduce resistance, it appears that the classical adversarial approach remains the dominant means of managing resistance. Resistance management may improve significantly if the adversarial approach is replaced with one that emphasizes more positive approaches.

People do resist change in personal because of they resist the uncertainties and the potential outcomes that change can cause. Optimists are more positive to see the possibilities in change and to accept it, while pessimists are more close to resist change because of their fear of the unknown or focus on the negative possibilities in change. Probably the most important factor in whether people accept or welcome change is related to their participation in it. Employees who have not been asked for their input are apt to resent or resist the change if they feel they could have contributed. Managers should be encouraged to search for alternative methods of introducing the innovation and to communicate and consult regularly with their employees. Employees must be given the opportunity to be involved in all aspects of the change project and the opportunity to provide feedback. Teamwork involving management and employees can overcome many of the difficulties experienced by organizations in the change progress. When managers should facilitate teamwork, they empower their workers to be involved and provide an environment to help employees accept change.

Resistance actually has a positive aspect, which managers should not overlook. It can play a crucial role in drawing attention to aspects of a proposed change that may actually be inappropriate, not well thought through or just wrong. In the other hand, resistance can be used as a change tools to understand units or employees respond. If the change is necessary and realize that unchanged will harm for their career, all units and employees will agree with the organization change under well know. Moreover, organization may overcome the adversity, untoward circumstance after the all reunited.

Any manager who plans to introduce change should recognize that some employees will welcome the change, some will resist or resent it, and other will be neutral. As companies in every industry are now translating the power and possibilities of e-business, and cybernation is becoming the strategic core of business, new approaches in change management and an understanding of the multifaceted nature of resistance are required to help organizations understand and accept the complex dynamics of innovation.

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