

Resistance to Change

Ross A. Wirth, Ph.D.
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Paper exercise

- Jot down change initiatives where you observed resistance
- Symptoms of the resistance
- Reasons behind the resistance

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- Symptoms and causes of resistance
 - Behaviors exhibited (1st & 2nd order)
 - Phases of resistance
- Resistance – by who's standard?
 - Change Agent as the cause of resistance
- Institutionalized resistance
 - Operant Power Balance

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Essence of Resistance

- "After all the downsizing, restructurings, takeovers or major strategic shifts in recent years, the last thing many employees want is more change."
Marks (2010).
- Lost of the "past" without a replaced "present"

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Grief Cycle – death of the past

1. Shock – caught unaware & unprepared
2. Denial – doesn't impact me
3. Anger – Why me? Why not someone else?
4. Bargaining – attempt at involvement in the change objective & process
5. Depression – acceptance of the loss of the past
6. Acceptance – coming on-board (compliance or commitment?)

Often an indication of a poor change process

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Phases of Change Acceptance

1. Ignore it – "won't happen"
2. Feel the pain – worse than originally thought
 - Isolate themselves from others physically or communicative (don't share information)
 - Whine & try to manipulate the system for personal gain
 - Become angry & aggressive toward others
 - Become territorial
3. Healing – start to look to the future
 - Focus on "me" – Tell me "the plan" – but it is still evolving
 - Opportunity for input (but may be committee driven)
4. Turning the corner – getting onboard
 - Possibly only compliance though

Hathaway (2000)

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Symptoms of Resistance

- Active resistance Symptoms, but don't tell why
 - Fault finding, being critical
 - Ridiculing, intimidating, or threatening
 - Appealing to fear
 - Manipulating, using facts selectively, distorting information
 - Blaming others, arguing
 - Sabotaging, starting rumors
- Passive resistance
 - Agreeing verbally, but not following through
 - Procrastinating, feigning ignorance
 - Withholding information, suggestions, or help

Hultman (1995)

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Reasons for Resistance

- Loss of positional power
- Perceived loss greater than personal gain
- Fear of the unknown
- Habit & inertia of the status quo
- Already tried it, didn't work
- Altered relationships within the group
- Disruption of group identity
- Disruption of individual identity
- Change implies fault-finding
- Occurring too fast to adapt
- Too radical a change
- Personality conflict with change agent
- Beyond our authority or responsibility
- Won't work in our industry
- Exposure to past failed efforts
- Peer pressure for conformity
- Forced change – lack of participation to this point
- Purpose of the change not clear
- Not broke, no need to fix it
- Limited resources (people, time, money)
- Too hard
- Now is not the time
- More study is needed
- Vested interests in the status quo
- Too new & untested
- ____ won't accept the change
- Investment in status quo
- Change implies other changes also

Axson (2007)

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Reasons at the personal level

- Needs already being met, no motivation to change
- **Believe** change will make it harder to meet personal needs
- Believe risks of change outweigh benefits
- Don't believe the current situation is all that bad
 - Just another way to get more work out of people
- Believe the change process is being mishandled
 - Feeling left out of having any control over things
- Believe the change process will fail, why bother?

Hultman (1995)

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Traditional Approach

- Verify the "facts" Fight the resistance – head on
 - What do we know?
- Challenge beliefs
 - What is your opinion? Do you think ____ ?
- Acknowledge emotions
 - How does ____ make you feel? Any concerns?
- Relate to values
 - What is important about how this is handled?
 - What are your priorities?

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Lewin Force Field

- Kurt Lewin – Force Field Analysis
 - Driving forces in opposite directions
 - to maintain the status quo
 - toward the change
 - Each force is a function of
 - Strength or force in directional impact
 - Rigidity – Ability to be altered
 - Rigid forces will require more force to be changed
 - Tactics target "forces" to implement change
 - Legitimacy of forces not addressed

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Core issues

- Cognitive dissonance
 - Conflict with what is believed to be true
 - You alter the change objective and/or process
 - Find a way for "them" to change
 - Discount the evidence of resistance as irrelevant
 - Refocus on the change & ignore the resistance
 - Introduces concept of how "resistance is constructed"
- Fear of the unknown
 - Personality trait
 - Extends to a shared meaning within the group

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Core issues

- Risk Acceptance
 - Self-efficacy – belief in personal capabilities
 - Knowledge of the underlying business case
- Build Trust – faith & concern for others
- Attitude toward Authority (acceptance of positional power)
- Machiavellianism – belief in manipulation

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Resistance – by who's standard?

- What is “resistance?”
 - “Resistance is what the change agent encounters when change first begins to come into view as a real possibility.” Brenner (2001)
 - Contains a negative implication – implies “not constructive”
 - Defined by the change agent, not by the recipient of the change effort!
- A (perceived) negative reaction to what is desired
 - thereby setting up a counter response of pushing back even harder

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Defining Resistance

- As defined & identified by the Change Agent
 - Resistance can be self-serving and potentially a self-fulfilling label
 - Plan for resistance and you will find it
 - Makes sense of change recipients reaction without the change agent having to change
 - Provides an excuse for failure by the change agent
 - Ignores the potential benefit of collaborating with change recipients
 - Building awareness & momentum for the change initiative
 - Corrective action in the design or conduct of the change process

Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio (2008)

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Presupposition of Resistance

- A presupposition of resistance will validate the “fact” that people resist change
 - Requires strategies for doing things to change recipients to help them make the shift to conform
 - And the change agent is not responsible if they continue to resist
 - Also sets up trust breaking & communication breakdown by the change agent
 - Violates psychological and implied contracts
 - Reallocation of resources (time, people, budget)
 - Reasons driving decision-making changed

Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio (2008)

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Sensemaking Process

- Broken trust & damaged relationships yield
 - Cynicism, critical behavior toward others, and lowered motivation
- Effective change requires sensemaking as an active process involving both change agent and change recipients
 - Established through open communication and dialogue
 - 1st order observations – objective
 - 2nd order interpretation – evaluation within context

Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio (2008)

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Communication Breakdown

- Failure to legitimize change
 - Foundation for rationale of change direction and readiness to move in that direction
 - Walk the Talk or any foundation will be undermined
 - Scrutiny is not resistance, but engagement
 - Legitimization is established through dialogue (sensemaking) Questioning, evaluating, & countering arguments
 - “Inoculation theory suggests that change agents who do not develop and provide compelling justifications that overcome the potential or prevailing counterarguments, or who fail to demonstrate the validity of those justifications, end up inoculating recipients and increasing their immunity to change.” (p. 366)

Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio (2008)

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Communication Breakdown

- Misrepresentation
 - May be intentional to solicit participation, drive acceptance (overly optimistic), or to “look good” as a change agent
 - There is also a natural bias toward optimism
 - Inadvertent inconsistencies may also become a point of contention
 - Frequent and enthusiastic communication may also risk overselling

Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio (2008)

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Communication Breakdown

- No call for action
 - Not all talk leads to action (but see inaction as resistance)
 - Overemphasize conversations for understanding and spend little time on performance-driven action
- Resisting Resistance
 - Change agents may themselves be resistant that others may not agree with their ideas, proposals, or counterarguments
 - Ignore resistance whereas explicit recognition often diffuses such resistance by giving it “voice” by becoming involved in the change process

Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio (2008)

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Active Persistence – not resistance

- Alternate view – active persistence
 - Change has progressed to the point where people can communicate how they feel
 - Not opposition to change, but attachment to “what is”
 - Anger & cynicism implies change agents failed to honor “what is and what has been” (Brenner, 2001)
 - Causes change agents to enter into dialogue and slow down. Do what should have been done earlier (if they had progressed correctly in the first place)

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Construction of Resistance

- An alternate viewpoint – complex adaptive system (CAS)
- Resistance as a natural response when change is perceived as a threat to personal or group identity
 - System tendency to move toward equilibrium
 - Introducing more information or disruption into the system will only trigger fluctuations that will be dampened
 - Need to move to the edge-of-chaos where a new “norm” can be discovered
 - Develop processes to generate more information about the organization (not just more information)

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Difference Questioning

- Disruptive questions that focus on differences
 - Emphasize differences in individual responses to questions vs. group averages
 - Contrast the original purpose of the structure with the outcome from what is in place
 - Identify core elements that are different in the thesis of the change initiative and that embodied in the resistance (as identified by change agents)
- Reframe resistance
 - Change assumption to one of co-development
 - Work with “resistance,” not against

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Advantages of Resistance

- Avoids group-think
- Provides alternatives for
 - Change Objectives
 - Process employed for change
- Resistance implies some engagement
 - Better than apathy

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Summary - Prevention

- Resistance is defined (and influenced) by the Change Agent
- Preventing "resistance"
 - Is everyone involved in setting the change objective? In establishing the change process?
 - Are you showing you understand the difficulties involved in the change?
 - Are you providing sufficient information to understand the business case for change? Is the vision evident?
 - Is there open discussion on the pros/cons of the change objective? The change process?

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Power of Empathy

- Understanding the business case
 - Engage on an intellectual level
- However, alignment for the change process also requires an environment of cooperation and trust
 - Need to acknowledge emotions associated with change

- Mark (2010)

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Actions to Avoid Resistance

- Employee participation
 - Gain a sense of ownership
 - Leverage employee knowledge to improve the change objective and/or process

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Institutionalized Resistance

- Positional power (even high social capital)
 - Resource allocation (including reward & coercion)
 - Policy making & enforcement
 - Denial of credibility
 - Expectation built into (sovereign) power hierarchy
 - Extends to who is "connected" to those in power
 - Systemic discrimination of mental models
 - Who is given "voice"
 - Women & minority issues at the forefront here
 - Attack the messenger – make it personal

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