

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

On a rational level, the inevitability of change and the necessity to manage the process in an organisation is unquestionable. Yet, one of the best-documented findings in organisational behaviour is that organisations and its members resist change. On the positive side, resistance to change provides some stability and predictability in behaviour. It serves as a check for impetuous decisions and can sometimes stimulate healthy conflict and result in a better decision in the end. On the other hand, resistance also hinders adaptation and progress.

HOW DOES RESISTANCE MANIFEST ITSELF?

- **Overtly and immediately:** the easiest manifestation to deal with because the negative reaction to change is immediately evident and can be addressed.
- **Implicitly:** the effects of this form of resistance are more subtle and are often reflected in the loss of loyalty to the company, demotivation, increased errors at work, increased absenteeism, etc. This form of resistance is difficult to recognise and is best addressed by a management-instigated dialogue.
- **Deferred:** a change may produce only apparently minimal reactions at the onset, but more major resistance surfaces a long time after the change has been implemented. The resister stockpiles his/her reactions until they erupt.

INDIVIDUAL SOURCES OF RESISTANCE

- **Habit** - change disrupts habits and forces people to acquire new ones. Breaking of programmed habits is psychologically uncomfortable.
- **Security** - people with a high need for security resist change because they perceive change as threatening to their safety.
- **Economic Factors** - individuals refuse to accept change if they feel it will reduce their income, especially if they have to learn to perform new tasks and their pay is contingent on their productivity.
- **Fear of the Unknown** - change substitutes ambiguity and uncertainty for what is known and comfortable. Fear of being unable to cope with the ambiguous and the unfamiliar causes people to develop a negative attitude toward it.
- **Selective Information Processing** - people perceive only what they want to perceive. If they have formed a negative opinion of an impending change, they will tend to ignore any information that contradicts that opinion.

ORGANISATIONAL RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

The larger and more deeply entrenched organisations become, the more likely they are to resist change. 6 major sources of organisational resistance to change have been identified:

- **Structural Inertia** - organisations have built in mechanisms for stability. For instance, they have formalised procedures for hiring, promoting, training and operating. People are hired on the basis of how well they will fit into that organisation. When change is implemented, the organisation is destabilised. People may no longer be compatible with the "new" organisation.
- **Limited Focus of Change** - organisations are made up of a large number of sub-systems. When a change is made in one, especially a small one with little power, and the other sub-systems are not informed about the change or do not accept it, the change in the small sub-system may be nullified.
- **Group Inertia** - even if individuals want to change, the group norms and people's tendency to conform may act as constraints.
- **Threat to Expertise** - changes in organisational patterns may threaten the felt expertise and the perceived importance of the skills of specialised groups who may then resist the change.
- **Threat to Established Power Relationships** - any redistribution of decision-making authority is a threat to long-established power relationships. For example, the introduction of the concepts of empowerment, participative decision-making and autonomous work teams are often seen as threats to the power wielded by some managers and supervisors.
- **Threat to Established Resource Allocations** - those in the organisation who benefit from large budgets and large staff sizes are happiest with the status quo. They resist change because their resources may be cut as a result.

OVERCOMING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

4 tactics suggested for use by change agents (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979) are:

- Education and Communication
- Participation
- Facilitation and Support
- Negotiation