

Change & Resistance

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Individual Resistance & Organizational Resistance

Resistance to change is the reluctance of people to adapt to change. Employees can be overt or covert about their unwillingness to adapt to organizational changes. This opposition can range from expressing their resistance publicly, to unknowingly resisting change through micro-resistance, language, or general actions.

Individual resistance occurs when employees resist change based on their unique perceptions, personalities, and needs. Organizational resistance is an institution's tendency to resist change and want to maintain the status quo; playing not loose vs playing to win. Organizations that suffer from organizational resistance become inflexible and struggle to adapt to environmental or internal demands for change. Some signs of organizational resistance include internal power struggles, poor decision-making processes, unconfident leadership, and bureaucratic structures.

Addressing Resistance with Positive Intentions

When addressing resistance, it's important to use language that is empathetic, respectful, and constructive.

Here are some tips:

1. **Empathetic Language:** Acknowledge the person's feelings and concerns. Use phrases like "I understand that you may have reservations about this," "I can see why you might feel this way" or "How might we work together to..."
2. **Respectful Tone:** Maintain a respectful and non-confrontational tone. Avoid using accusatory or judgmental language. Think about your non-verbals and the energy you bring to the conversation.
3. **Open-Ended Questions:** Encourage dialogue by asking open-ended questions like "Can you tell me more about your concerns?" This can help uncover the root causes of resistance.
4. **Positive Framing:** Present the change or idea in a positive light. Explain how it can benefit the individual or the team. Use phrases like "This change can lead to improved efficiency" or "Here's how this can make our work easier."
5. **Active Listening:** Show that you are actively listening by paraphrasing what the person says and validating their feelings. For example, "So, you're concerned about..." , "Something you value is...", "An assumption your holding onto is..."

6. Offer Solutions: If possible, provide solutions or alternatives that address the person's concerns. This shows that you value their input and are willing to work together to find a solution. Before offering suggestions ensure you have paraphrased so that you have common understandings of the root issues/causes. Then ask for permission "Would you like an idea?" Or "Would you like to brainstorm some possible solutions?"
7. Use "We" Language: Instead of saying "you should do this," use "we" language to convey that you're in it together. For example, "Let's work together to find a solution that works for everyone" or "As we work/learn together..."
8. Clarify Expectations: Make sure there's a clear understanding of what is expected. Miscommunication can often lead to resistance, so clarify roles, responsibilities, and timelines. Define agreements if/when necessary, "What I/we need from you is...what do you need from me/us?"
9. Highlight Past Successes: If applicable, remind the person of past successes and how overcoming resistance has led to positive outcomes in the past.
10. Patience: Be patient and give the person time to process and accept the change. Resistance may not be overcome immediately. If necessary pause the conversation and come back to it within a defined timeline, "This is a complex topic and let's take a day to think about this and come back together".

By utilizing these strategies and language, you can create an environment that encourages understanding, reduces resistance, and promotes a more positive outlook on the impending changes. Remember that addressing resistance is often about building trust and fostering a collaborative environment where concerns are heard and addressed constructively.

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