BEITLER

on

OVERCOMING

RESISTANCE

TO CHANGE

A **Practitioner's** Guide
for
Change Leaders and Consultants

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Overcoming Resistance to Change

In my training/consulting practice the most frequent phone call I receive involves clients or prospective clients asking how to overcome resistance to change in their organizations.

Throughout my writing I recommend a strategy-driven systematic approach to planning and implementing change. Unfortunately, many organizations do not follow a systematic approach (my approach or anybody else's) for planning and implementing organizational change.

An Unworkable "Plan"

Most organizations still attempt the following "plan" for organizational change:

1. senior management determines that a change is needed

2. the CEO announces the change to "the troops"

3. the senior managers cross their fingers and pray for the best

Needless to say, this "plan" is inviting resistance.

Seven Essential Change Elements

In the unworkable plan above, senior management has failed to consider the following seven essential elements for successful organizational change:

1. Involve the people who will be affecting (and affected by) the change. (No buy-in from these folks guarantees resistance.)

2. Communicate a good reason (one that is relevant and strategy-driven) for the change. (Busy people will resist changes that they see as irrelevant.)

3. Designate a champion for the change. (It is critical to have a respected person in charge of the change process.)

4. Create a transition management team. (No one individual is charismatic or talented enough to implement an organizational change.)

5. Provide training in new values, skills, and behaviors. (Change typically involves new competencies.)

6. Bring in outside help. (Most senior managers are not trained in facilitating organizational change.)

7. Reward people. (People are the essential ingredient in every successful change.)

I will offer more detailed guidance on these seven essential elements of organizational change later in this report. But first, let's start with the basics.

The Nature of Change

In our role as change consultants, we must help senior managers understand the nature of "the beast" (the change process). Fortunately, a considerable amount of research is available to help us explain the change process.

I often hear managers worrying about how to get "everybody on-board." In reality, 100% buy-in for the change is not necessary initially. (I would suggest that it is not even desirable.)

Scott and Jaffe's (1995) work suggests that we only need 5% of the organizational members "on-board" for a change to be "imbedded." Imbedded implies that the change has roots. They go on to say a 20% adoption rate means the change is "unstoppable."
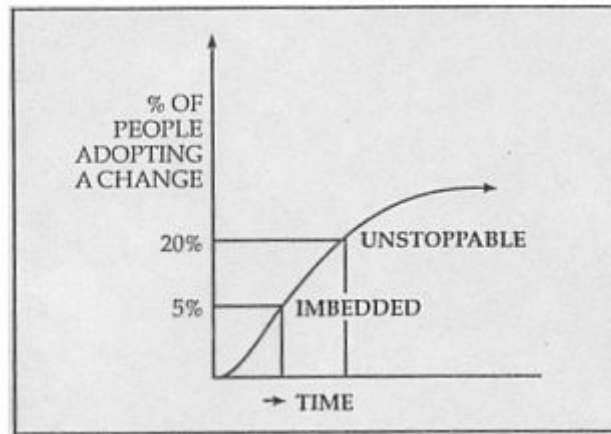
Figure 1: Source-Scott & Jaffe (1995)

Personally, from my own experience, 5% and 20% seem a bit low. Intuitively, I would guess about 10% and 25%. But, for the sake of our discussion here, let's assume 5% and 20% is correct. (Of course, which organizational members are on-board would affect the percentages.)

What Scott and Jaffe imply here is very important. We don't need 100% buy-in initially. In fact, we only need a small fraction of the organizational members' support.

So, if we only need a small percentage of organizational members on-board, where should we focus our efforts? To answer this question, we turn to our colleagues in the field on marketing.

Marketing experts have known for many years to go for the innovators and

early adopters in the field. The majority will invariably follow the innovators and

early adopters. Marketing experts spend little or no time, energy, or money on the
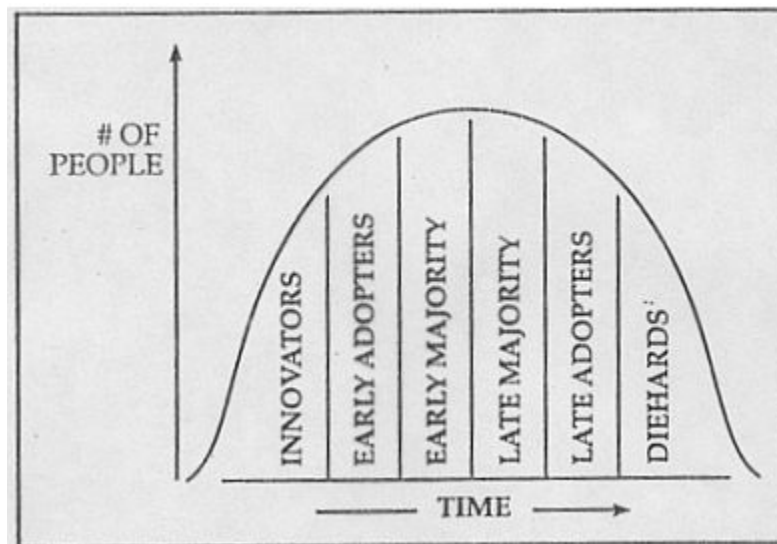
diehards.

Figure 2: Source-Scott & Jaffe (1995)

When we combine these two findings, our strategy becomes clear. We need

to get at least 5% of the organizational leaders (the respected innovators and early

adopters) on board. Then we must allow some time for the majority to follow. The

majority, most likely, will not accept organizational change immediately. (The

more threatening the change, the resistance we should expect.)

Organizational resources (time, energy, and money) should not be spent on the diehards. If the change is required by the strategic plan, diehards must adopt the change or be fired.

Four Phases of Change

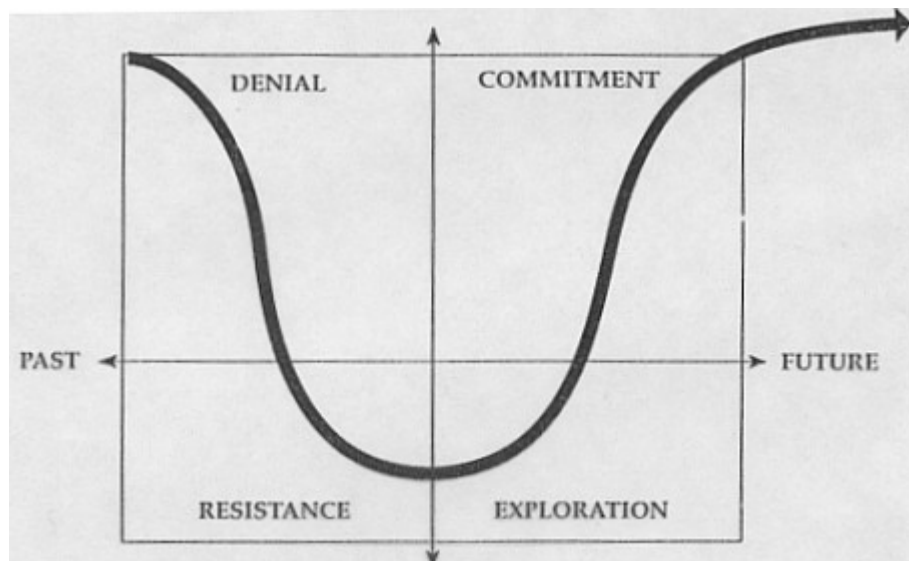If you are a visual-type learner like I am, you will benefit from what I call the "Four Phase Model of Change."

Figure 3: The Four Phase Model of Change

"The Transition Grid" from Flora/Elkind Assoc. & HeartWork, Inc.

The four phase model allows you, your organization, and your client to visualize the current phase of a change effort. This awareness is critical because each phase requires different behaviors from change leaders and facilitators. Consultants and organizational change leaders must be able to diagnose the current phase of a change effort. As you can see in Figure 3, there are four phases: denial, resistance, exploration, and commitment.

Diagnosing the Phase of Change

The four phases of change have very different characteristics. The two phases above the horizontal line, denial and commitment, are both characterized by calm on the surface, few emotional displays, and quiet. The two phases below the horizontal line, resistance and exploration, are characterized by strong emotional displays and frequent verbal exchanges.

The two phases on the left of the vertical line, denial and resistance, are characterized by fear of loss and other negative emotions. The two phases on the right of the vertical line, exploration and commitment, are characterized by hopefulness and other positive emotions.

The Denial Phase

It's critical that we clearly spot the denial phase. This is the phase that's most deceiving for many organizational leaders.

Many executives have made the disastrous mistake of believing that quiet workers who are not complaining (typical in the denial phase) are "committed." I have countless sad examples of this mistake. Be sure you can distinguish between people on denial and people in commitment.

During the denial phase, workers may continue their daily tasks as if nothing has happened, as if the change was never announced. It is a mistake to see this behavior as rebellion. Keep in mind that people are busy, often overwhelmed by their current demands.

Announced changes are often ignored or "overlooked" because they appear to be irrelevant or unimportant. People are busy. They only respond to things that they perceive as urgent or important; it must relevant to them.

Another issue in the denial phase is fear. Fear can be paralyzing. Some organizational members will simply stop doing their work. Again, don't see this as rebellion, but as a need for guidance. You can see here the critical importance of leadership.

If organizational members are displaying the characteristics of denial, leaders must know how to respond. Consider the following:

- give people time

- schedule an information session after the announcement

- "confront" organizational members with facts and information

- explain what to expect

Giving people time to process the possible consequences of a change is essential. I have watched senior executives work on change intervention planning behind closed doors for months. These executives understand the urgency, relevance, importance, and the possible ramifications of the change.

After months of planning work, senior executives are ready to move forward with the change, of course. So, when the executives announce the change to the troops they expect immediate buy-in. Is this a reasonable expectation?

While it is courteous to ask for questions after a major change announcement, it is unreasonable to expect uninitiated workers to be ready to express all of their concerns at that time. The best thing to do is to schedule a time and place for an information session that will provide details and answer questions.

Give people time to process what is happening.

By confronting organizational members with facts and information, I don't mean "confront" with the typical negative connotation. These folks are not in rebellion, they are fearful. People dealing with fear need facts and information to calm their anxiety. Don't appear secretive. Mistrust increases anxiety. Be as open, honest, and helpful as possible.

Explaining what to expect helps to reduce anxiety. Remember fear paralyzes. Build confidence and creativity by reducing fear.

The Resistance Phase

The most disturbing phase for change leaders is the resistance phase. This phase is typically characterized by loud unpleasant vocal exchanges, ugly comments, and anger. These are actually signs of progress!

But, as you can imagine, organizational leaders usually do not see these signs as positive. Frequently, leaders ask me how they can go back to the way things were initially. While that seems humorous to me as the emotionally detached consultant, you can understand what they are feeling.

After mistakenly diagnosing denial for commitment, organizational leaders

assumed they had buy-in from the quiet troops. The current emotional outbursts (and other signs of resistance) appear to be the opposite of progress.

While leaders are looking at me in disbelief, I assure them progress is being made. Employee objections and concerns are now coming to the surface. This provides two important things for change leaders:

1. Actual objections and concerns can be dealt with. We are now beyond guessing what the objections and concerns are.

2. Workers, who are "in the trenches," can offer valuable insights. These workers are more aware of the day-to-day operations than senior executives.

If change leaders remain calm, this can be a valuable time. During this phase, it is possible to build trust, exchange insights, and create more productive relationships.

As in the denial phase, leaders must know how to respond in the resistance phase. Consider the following:

• acknowledge feelings

• listen

• don't try to talk people out of their feelings

• if you allow people to vent, without retaliation, you build trust

By acknowledging that it's OK to have feelings, workers feel free to express their concerns. Remember, we need their feedback in any form we can get it. Let them know you want to hear their thoughts and feelings.

Listening is perhaps the hardest skill to develop. Listening in an emotionally charged situation is especially difficult.

The key to effective listening is for you to <u>not</u> concentrate on yourself. It takes a "big" person to ignore emotionally charged comments that appear to be personal attacks. Becoming defensive and counter-attacking are the worst things you can do. Counter-attacking will escalate "the battle" and reduce trust levels. Low levels of trust invariably lead to poor communication.

So, the key to effectively listening, put another way, is to concentrate on the other person. Remember the other person is angry or fearful, so don't expect an articulate expression of ideas. Look through the emotions to see the true concerns of the individual. As the trust level rises, the person will sound more rational. Remain calm and look for the real concerns.

"Don't try to talk people out of their feelings" is good advice. The person has feelings or emotions for a reason(s). To arrive at a particular negative feeling

or emotion, a person must first process their perceptions cognitively.

It is terribly insulting to tell somebody that he or she should not feel angry or sad (or anything else). You are essentially telling him or her that are stupid or foolish; not a good way to build a relationship.

As stated earlier, the resistance phase is potentially valuable for creating trust and building productive relationships. If you allow people to vent, without retaliation, you build trust. Trust is the foundation for every productive relationship.

Allowing workers to vent during the resistance phase can be difficult and exhausting, but keep the benefits in mind.

The Exploration Phase

The mood suddenly turns positive during the exploration phase. Verbal expression and high-energy levels continue, but the atmosphere has clearly turned positive.

During this phase, employees are looking for opportunities. It's now obvious the change will happen, so workers adopt a let's-make–the-best-of-it attitude.

This phase can be very valuable too. The highly energized positive atmosphere is conducive to generating large numbers of good ideas. Some of the

ideas may be overly optimistic and unworkable, but it's better to have too many ideas than too few.

Once again, change leaders must know how to respond during the exploration phase. Consider the following:

- focus on priorities

- set short-term goals

- provide training

- conduct implementation sessions

During the exploration phase, workers will be dreaming up all kinds of possibilities. This is not bad; in fact it should be encouraged. But, it's the task of change leaders to help workers focus on priorities. This requires a clearly articulated vision with measurable goals.

While long-term goals can be inspiring, short-term goals are critical. Short-term "wins" are necessary to keep enthusiasm levels high. The nay-sayers will quickly pounce on a change effort that is not producing results. The old Chinese proverb, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step," applies here. Be sure everybody clearly sees the next step.

The role of training cannot be overemphasized. Most changes require new KSAs (knowledge, skills, and attitudes). This requires training needs analysis, training design, properly conducted training, and training evaluation. For more detail on this process see the book *Strategic Organizational Learning* (Beitler, 2005, chapter 3).

During the exploration phase, it is also important to conduct regular implementation meetings. These meetings provide a feedback loop. Are we on track? Are there opportunities we can take advantage of? Is additional training or resources required?

Even though the exploration phase is positive, it still will not manage itself. This phase requires competent leadership.

The Commitment Phase

This is probably the most difficult phase to attain, but the easiest to manage.

Raising or modifying long-term goals is possible after short-term goals have been accomplished. After the confidence level of the workers has been raised to a sufficient level, it's time to stretch to even higher goals.

The commitment phase is also the time to devote effort to teambuilding.

Teambuilding leads to synergy. Team members should be aware of the other members' knowledge, skills, and workplace preferences. I have done in-house teambuilding workshops for organizations for many years with great results.

Rewarding those individuals who respond positively and help move the change effort forward is critical. To "anchor" (Kotter, 1996, chapter 10) the new changes in the organizational culture, new behaviors have to be reinforced (rewarded).

While I disagree with many of the assumptions of the behavioral psychologists, I completely agree with John Watson's famous assertion, "Whatever behavior you reward, you get more of." Be careful what you reward, or fail to reward.

Seven Essential Change Elements – Revisited

Let's conclude this report by revisiting the seven essential change elements. Let's look at each one in more detail.

First, involve organizational members in change planning. Get their input. Workers can anticipate may of the potential problems the organization will face when attempting to implement the change. Even if the workers do not agree with

the change decision, they will appreciate being part of the decision-making process. Employee buy-in is necessary to avoid high levels of resistance.

Second, have a good reason for making the change. In today's world everybody's busy. If employees don't see a reason for the change they won't get on-board. Show employees how the change is relevant to the organization's success, and their own.

Third, put a respected person in charge of the change intervention. A senior executive or the owner of the business does not have to be the "champion" of every change. In fact, it might be better to find somebody the workers can relate to. A respected co-worker may be the ideal leader for a particular change. Look for a natural leader who has already bought-in to the change.

Fourth, create a transition management team. If your organization is large enough to have many departments or teams, a transition management team offers many advantages. This team can function as a community of practice (see Beitler, 2005, chapter 5), providing both ideas and emotional support. Simply pick a change leader from each department, and then encourage regular meetings. Be sure to support the transition management team with organizational resources (time and/or money).

Fifth, provide training for the new KSAs that are required by the change. Remember, fear of loss leads to resistance to change. If workers fear a loss of competency, they will resist the change. They will want to revert to the old way of doing things. All of us want to feel competent. Make sure employees are trained on new equipment, software, or procedures.

Sixth, bring in outside help. I realize this sounds terribly self-serving for me to say this. But, consider the advantages. An outside consultant, like me, can bring in ideas that have worked in other organizations. An outsider brings a fresh perspective. An outsider doesn't have an "axe to grind." In the organization chooses Plan A or Plan B, the consultant doesn't care (financially or emotionally).

And seventh, reward new behaviors. Remember, whatever behaviors you reward, you get more of. Rewards do not have to be in the form of cash. (In fact, if you want to remain competitive you must conserve cash.) Consider other types of rewards. Acknowledgment, praise, new job assignments, or additional decision-making authority can be more powerful motivators than cash. Of course, this means you must know what motivates particular employees; it may be something other than what motivates you.

Conclusion

Overcoming resistance to change is an essential part of successfully

implementing any change. The steps outlined in this special report are just a small

part of the entire change process. For more information on change issues see

Mike's book, "Strategic Organizational Change."

www.strategicorganizationalchange.com

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BONUS #1

Stakeholder Analysis Worksheet

The purpose of this worksheet is to develop a comprehensive list of all the stakeholders in a change effort. It is critical to be aware of each stakeholder's stake.

Stakeholder (Individual or Group)	Stake/Interest	Level of Support				
		+2	+1	0	-1	-2

Diagnosing Tips:
First – place an "X" in the box for their current level of support
Second – place a "*" in the box of the necessary level of support

NOTE: All the players <u>do not</u> have to be positive. Some players may only "need" to be neutral.

BONUS #2

Group and Individual Resistance to Change Worksheet

The purpose of this worksheet is to diagnose where your groups and individual members are currently in the four phases of change.

Name	Behaviors	Phase

After completing the diagnosis of your group and individual members: answer the following questions:

1. What actions are necessary to move the group to the next phase?

2. Which individuals in the group could serve as leaders for the change? How should they be rewarded?

3. Which individuals are holding back the progress of the group? How can their concerns and needs be addressed?

BONUS #3

Change Announcement Worksheet

The purpose of this worksheet is to guide the preparation before the actual announcement of the change. Answer the following questions before you announce the change.

1. What exactly is changing? (Be specific) _____

   _____

2. What are the reasons for the change? (Establish urgency) _____

   _____

   _____

3. What are the benefits of the change? _____

   _____

   _____

4. What are the negatives of the change? _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. What details are still not known? _____

   _____

   _____

6. How will questions about the change be answered? _____

   _____

   _____