



Manager's Guide

ON RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

EXPLORING CHANGE IS ESSENTIAL

*This **Managers' Guide** is an effective communications tool to assist you in sharing information with your staff.*

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What is resistance?

Resistance is a natural response that is always present in change efforts. Resistance is a reaction to the direction and the process of change.

Why employees resist change

Below are some of the reasons employees may resist the process of change:

- don't feel included in it or don't have their needs or interests represented;
- don't feel informed or adequately communicated to about it;
- perceive the decision-making process as unfair;
- feel overwhelmed by the number of change initiatives; and/or
- feel they can't succeed in the changed state because of inadequate expertise or training.

Transition Cycle

During organizational change, individuals at all levels will experience a natural and predictable transition cycle:

• Denial

The first response to a significant or unexpected change is often shock or a general refusal to recognize the change. You may hear things such as "this can't be happening", or notice a refusal to hear new information. Denial is a temporary defence that usually shifts into resistance once the reality and impact of the change becomes apparent.

• Resistance

During this phase, people are mourning the past more than preparing for the future. They are wondering how they can postpone or avoid the change. There can be feelings of loss, anger, frustration, confusion and incompetence as they start to let go of the current state and move slowly toward the desired future state. It is important to realize that people don't resist change, they resist loss. Resistance is not something that can or should be avoided. It is something to recognize and leverage.

• Exploration

After a period of struggle, people start to shift into a more positive, hopeful, exploratory state. They begin to put energy toward the "new", and feel motivated to swing into action, trying out new behaviours and tasks. There will be a shift in attitude toward "It's going to be ok".

• Acceptance

Finally, people discover new ways of doing things and adapt to the new state. They begin to experience a higher level of competence, are more focused and become committed to moving forward.

Moving through these stages takes time and may differ depending on the complexity of the change and people's experience in handling change. As a manager, it is important that you understand all reactions to change – your own, that of your team, of your superiors, and the organizational system.

THE MANAGER'S ROLE IN UNDERSTANDING

RESISTANCE

How can you leverage resistance within your team?

Resistance is an inevitable aspect of change. It cannot and should not be ignored. When you see resistance, take the time to listen. There is invaluable information being provided that you can leverage. The best ingredient to facilitate the transition and reduce resistance is through constant and ongoing communication. Resistance can be minimized by keeping an open, honest forum where your staff can input and share their opinions and feelings about the changes.

Tips for responding to resistance from your staff:

- Explain the reasons for change –and plan to do so several times. Messages

need to be repeated in order to be understood. When people are at different phases of the transition cycle, they will hear things differently.

- Be clear on what is expected of your staff – changes in behaviour or daily work, even if people have not fully embraced the change, it is important that they understand what they need to continue/stop/start doing.
- Be a model – demonstrate what you expect people to do.

- Allow time for the need to change to sink in.
- Listen to staff concerns and complaints. Offer support and engage staff in problem-solving dialogues.
- Acknowledge feelings and demonstrate empathy.
- Support mourning of loss.
- Seek coaching for you as a manager.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



These sample questions are to help answer concerns you may have about resistance

1. There is a plan to merge three organizations within Division X into one new Directorate Alpha. This change was full of optimism and planning at the beginning of the process. However, it has been two years since the initial move occurred and not all changes necessary for the merge have been fully implemented (i.e., no formal name yet, which requires the use of the old name for the time being, classification reviews have not yet been completed, etc...). Initially there was some resistance but it has only increased due to the time it has taken to complete the proposed changes.

Advice from the experts

In this case, it seems that the momentum was not sustained. It is important when undertaking a change initiative that you plan for the long term and do not stop the planning after the launch. Continuous positive reinforcement of desired new behaviours and ongoing communication are critical. It is important to leave the “old way” as soon as you can and take on the “new” identity – at least informally. The phrase “not official yet” in terms of a move is a way of resisting and being in denial of the changes. You might hold off on changing intranet sites or developing

new marketing materials, but do start referring to yourselves under the new identity and change your signature blocks. The sooner you see yourselves differently, the sooner the change will sink in and be real.

Remember that resistance is a normal part of the change process. Resistance should not be seen as a negative as it can actually signal engagement. Talk to your staff and understand what they are resisting and why. They may have some valuable insights and perspectives that are worth considering. It is critical to listen. Find out what people need and leverage those needs.

An important step in change management is conducting lessons learned and course correcting as needed. Ensure you clarify roles and expectations early on in the process. If you are seeing great resistance, bring in others to help – or discuss with others who have gone through a similar change.

2. A new change initiative was being designed which would provide 24/7 user support. This would mean a change in hours for some staff by introducing shift work for some or

requiring them to be on call. Before the details of this proposed change had even begun to be explored, the rumours were out that this concept was on the horizon. At that point, staff began to show resistance and some were even offended that this concept would even be considered.

Advice from the experts

This example speaks to the importance of being aware of impacts on staff as well as the need for transparency and at times some discretion. At times, it is important to keep things quiet until you are ready to communicate the case for change and the way forward. However, no information can produce rumours, which are the best way to discredit a good idea. (OR, “which are the worst way to communicate a good idea.”)

If rumours do arise, have a plan for addressing them that includes communicating the case for change – why the change needs to happen and what are its intended benefits. Be clear on who will shape the change. Will

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



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employees be involved and have input in the process? Be clear about what people need to let go of or do differently, and what will stay the same. Will this affect everyone? Will people be able to self-select because there may be those for whom shift work would work incredibly well.

Resistance can be very helpful in this instance – you are hearing about what people need and can build it into the plan at the earliest stage, hopefully increasing buy-in and reducing future instances of resistance.

3. A certain type of resistance to change is the “déjà-vu” syndrome – “been there, done that, it did not work then, what makes you think it will work this time”. Unfortunately, resistance coming from this group carries a lot of weight within the organization. Some staff are well set in their ways, have good arguments against the change, have a lot of influence and are often regarded as the informal leaders. Others who would most likely be very receptive to changes often respect

and value the perspectives of these co-workers and managers.

Advice from the experts

In times of change, giving a voice to all views and hearing them as different ways to look at the situation or providing more information, can be a real asset.

It is very important that you acknowledge the past and that you acknowledge the expertise of your staff. To address the “been there, done that” attitude, do an historic walk-through. Explain or involve people in explaining where we were as a group, where we are today and the drivers that are now causing us to change. Educate your staff that change management is a corporate competency and that they have a responsibility to lead change.

People might feel threatened by the changes. Let them know they are valued. This type of communication may be best done through one-on-one meetings. Be aware that during the change, you may need to performance-manage. Be clear on expectations early on in the process and hold people accountable. If necessary, re-prioritize tasks to ensure the change is a top priority.

Starting the Conversation

Purpose: To outline the key points that you want to share with your employees and provide a framework for your future conversations.

Communication is key for overcoming resistance. You should actively promote the change and discuss barriers to change with your employees; they have an equal responsibility to communicate with you. The goal of these discussions is to have two-way conversations with employees, and allow them to provide input and talk about their reactions and needs.

Remember that responding to resistance will often require creative thinking on your part, and reliance on your judgement and interpersonal skills, because different employees going through different stages of the process will require very different kinds of help.

Use existing tools and programs to help focus your resistance discussions.

The LCC offers many courses on people

management that help managers develop leadership skills. In particular, take the “You and Change”

course for insight into

your own reactions to

change. You are also

encouraged to use the

resources available to

you such as the EAP, CF’s Health

Promotion Program, and courses offered

by the Canada School of Public Service.



Seven Core Needs

Change triggers a subconscious core human need, which then triggers resistance and fear. Below are the seven core human needs that are affected in times of change and strategies to meet these needs:

Need	What to do:
1. Security	Keep staff informed from the beginning: • share what you know, and what you don't know • avoid surprises
2. Inclusion	• Ask staff for input and feedback • Involve staff in the design of the change
3. Power	• Find ways to give staff influence • Inform staff of the various change initiatives so they can better understand the process • Be clear as to how they can contribute • Encourage people to get involved
4. Control	• Communicate the change strategy and process plan early • Keep staff informed of all decisions, progress and next steps regardless of how minor you consider them to be
5. Competence	• Make learning expectations/pace known early • Provide learning resources and coaching
6. Justice/Fairness	• Treat all members of your team fairly • Be transparent
7. Being liked/connected	• Show care and concern • Acknowledge the difficulties your staff face • Be empathetic and initially tolerant of resistance • Be available to your staff

CONTACTS & REFERENCES

Information for this guide obtained from:

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