

Resistance to Change

INTRODUCTION

Resistance to change is one of the most common reasons for project delays and failure. There are many reasons for resistance to change, including fear of losing jobs, uncertainty in learning new skills, change in routine, confusion, fear of the unknown, change in responsibilities or authority (especially processes spanning organizational and functional boundaries where processes are being centralized or distributed), and personal financial impact (e.g., changes in sales commissions, incentive compensation, time-keeping). Resistance to change can be at the staff level, and also at the supervisory or management level.

These change management recommendations assume that the changes to be implemented are appropriately designed for efficiency and return on investment. Project managers and sponsors should be aware that in some cases the “resistance” is more than a discomfort with change. Individuals may not support the organizational vision, or they may not believe that the planned changes will achieve the intended outcomes. They may not believe that their concerns have been heard or that they are adequately trained and ready. Project managers and sponsors should listen carefully to messages of resistance and perform sufficient analysis to understand the reasons and decide on the appropriate response.

REASONS FOR APPARENT RESISTANCE AND STRATEGIES

Reason	Strategies
Lack of clarity about organizational goals and priorities. Employees either don't know what changes are being requested, or don't understand why the change is needed.	See Organizational Change Control - Vision
Lack of agreement with goals. Employees understand the goals but don't agree with them.	Power tools
Lack of agreement with solution. Employees understand the goals and agree with them. They don't believe the changes will achieve the goals. They may have specific knowledge that organizational leaders don't have.	Process for creative ideas, evaluation of options, consideration of trade-offs
Feeling left out. Employees don't feel they were consulted or listened to in determining the proposed changes.	Organizational behavioral interventions

Reason	Strategies
<p>Personal interest.</p> <p>Employees are concerned that the changes may have negative consequences for them – e.g., more work, less money, less autonomy, less control, less prestige, etc.</p>	<p>Organizational behavioral interventions</p>
<p>Lack of support</p> <p>Employees believe that the change will require a lot of effort on their part that will not be appreciated, or that they will not receive the support needed from others, including management.</p>	<p>Training</p> <p>Collaboration</p> <p>Recognition programs</p>
<p>Lack of belief in leadership</p> <p>May include belief that this latest change is just the flavor of the month, that it won't make any difference, or won't be carried through.</p>	<p>See Organizational Change formal process</p> <p>Clarify accountability</p>
<p>Lack of knowledge or experience</p> <p>Employees don't have the background, experience, or knowledge to do what is being asked.</p>	<p>Training</p> <p>Benchmarks (other organizations, industry standards)</p> <p>Best practices (templates, systems)</p>

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- What has worked well, or not worked, in the past? Why?
- Does the organization have any experience with programs such as LEAN or Six Sigma?
- What is the culture?
 - Top down, command-and-control?
 - Collaborative teams
 - Competition between groups
 - Grassroots effort
 - Learning organization, used to constant change and improvement