



FAQs on Change in the Workplace

Why do people resist change?

1. Human beings like certainty. For most people, change creates uncertainty and uncertainty makes people anxious - anxious about the future, anxious about whether they will be able to cope with what change will bring.



An important learning for us at Change Management Professionals is that most people are not *resistant* to change – they are *reluctant* to change. This is an important distinction and more than semantics. People are reluctant, especially at the outset of a change, because so much is unknown. Many change leaders confuse reluctance with resistance and then act in ways like expecting people to quickly “get it” that turn reluctance into hardened resistance. This makes the process of leading change much more challenging, especially if those labeled as “resisters” are in positions of influence.

Because most people are anxious about the uncertainty change creates, they need leaders who take a deliberate, thoughtful and proactive approach to help them to understand why the change is happening and to know its impact, and especially how it will impact them – personally and professionally. They also need time to hear, absorb, understand and change.

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2. What is the role of a change leader?

A key role of change leaders in any organization, large or small, is to turn employee reluctance into readiness. This can only be achieved through a proactive strategy and an approach that is focused on helping people move successfully through change.

Too often organizations focus primarily on the technical side of change like implementing a new IT system, or adopting new procedures. By concentrating less on the people within their organization, they create the very resistance they are trying to avoid.

A proactive approach by leaders mitigates reluctance and resistance and helps employees to be ready and embrace the change.

3. To assess the need for changes in your organization to either resolve a problem or seize an opportunity, consider answering these 6 questions:

1. How is this problem or issue affecting the organization? Is it having a negative impact on sales, financial results, future business opportunities, your employees or your service to customers? (What is happening or not happening that is not acceptable?)
2. How will solving this problem or addressing this issue benefit the organization? (What will success look like?)
3. Why is it important to address the problem/issue now? (What are the risks if you do nothing?)
4. How will the changes impact employees & other stakeholders? (Will there be a significant change to what and how work will be performed? / A culture change?)
5. What is your history of success with changes of this magnitude?
6. Does the organization have the capacity to make the necessary changes on its own?
 - a. Defining the Problem
 - b. Defining the Solution
 - c. Establishing Measurable Outcomes
 - d. Planning the Technical Change (New Software, Org. Structure, etc.)
 - e. Implementing the Technical Change
 - f. Planning/Executing the “People Side” of the Change (Transforming employee reluctance and resistance into readiness - embracing and adopting the changes)

4. My organization may need professional help effecting change but how can I be sure?

If this question is top of mind then you are likely already contemplating a change.

Here are 3 helpful statements to consider. If you agree with even one, the chances are very great that you need assistance with your change. You may want to consult with someone outside your organization, like Change Management Professionals, before you begin:

1. The scope of the change is large and its impact will be organization-wide or will affect multiple stakeholders.

The larger the scope, the greater amount of time is necessary for planning, coordinating, communicating, training, etc. across the organization. For leaders, this can divert time away from other equally important activities.

2. The change must be completed in less than 12 months.

Usually, the shorter the time to deliver means the less flexibility for the organization if any step does not go according to plan. The situation becomes more complicated and the risks become greater if the scope of the change involves more than one work group or is organization wide.

3. A successful outcome will depend significantly on employees changing what work will be done and how their work will be accomplished.

If success highly depends on people changing the way they perform work, then the risks to achieving a positive outcome are increased substantially. As complex as the change itself may be, leading people through change is often the most challenging.



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5. What is the benefit of working with management consultants who are also experts in change management?

Regardless of what changes an organization is contemplating, a successful outcome is most often dependant on ensuring that staff members within understand and accept the change and move through the process of change well.

Not surprisingly, this is where most organizations fail. Employees resisting change can cause unnecessary delays and costs which in turn applies stress on leadership in particular and the organization in general.

That's why it is a good investment to work with management consultants who can provide a solution to resolve your problem or issue AND to also help your employees embrace the change, while mitigating resistance and stress on the organization. Change Management Professionals can help you manage the change and manage the people involved in that change.

6. What is the greatest obstacle to successful change?

The most common barrier to successful change is resistance from staff and managers.



It's important to understand that reluctance and resistance are normal during the early period of a change. Employees are grappling to understand both the "why" of it and what impact change will have on them.

However, if left unchecked, this initial resistance has the potential to grow into a disruptive force, causing unnecessary delays, additional costs and negatively impacting outcomes. A proactive and deliberate change management strategy that engages all key stakeholders is critical for any change to be successful.

7. Why do managers resist change?

Change brings uncertainty and for managers this uncertainty usually translates to fear of loss of control or power. This can be especially true if they are already feeling overwhelmed with current responsibilities – which may include dealing with other changes.



Resistance from managers can be mitigated by ensuring they have a clear understanding about why the change is happening, the consequences for the organization if there is no change, and how the change impacts them and their work group(s). Mid-level managers also need to be supported in a forum where they can safely and privately share their concerns and have them addressed.

8. Can managers lead their teams through a change when they do not have information?

The short answer is, no, certainly not effectively unless they are given support from their leaders. This is a common concern of most managers who often measure their effectiveness by the knowledge and experience they draw upon every day to make good leadership decisions.

Managers, like the employees who report to them, must go through the change process. However, unlike their employees, managers must also lead others through the uncertainty of change. With important information unavailable to them, it is understandable when a manager, faced with the uncertainty and loss of power that change brings, resorts to expressing feelings of frustration and of being “out of the loop”.

These feelings left unchecked or not addressed with positive support, can lead to resistance. To compound the problem, if this manager is an influencer within the organization, resistance will then spread and may jeopardize the change time line and/or identified goals from the change.

For these reasons and for staff morale in general, it is so important to support managers and provide them with tools to communicate effectively with their team even when they don't have the answers. Start by letting them know it's ok to say, “I don't know the answer. Let me check” and encouraging them to engage with their team.

9. I don't understand it. I met with my employees and explained the reasons why we are making a change in the business, but most did not get the message. What am I doing wrong?

For most employees hearing a message once, especially about change, is not enough. Only about one in ten employees will be enthusiastic after hearing about a change for the first time. These are the rarer people who are motivated by something new.

Most employees, however, need time to process the change and need to hear more about it. Specifically, most employees will need to understand how they will be affected by the change, what they will need to know to be successful, what new skills are required and what training will be provided.

Remember, change is a process not an event! Change requires ongoing communication on the part of leaders, including one-on-one meetings where employees can get their questions answered and share their concerns.

10. What are Change Champions and what is their role?

Change Champions are individuals within an organization who volunteer or are selected to facilitate change. They are informal leaders who can be from any level within the organization. Change Champions help others understand “why” we are moving through this change. They are key to a successful change outcome.

Change Champions:

- Believe in the change, support the Vision, and are energized for change.
- Motivate others to share in the change experience.

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