

Communication Strategies for Managing Change

Most of us deny that we resist change. At the same time, we're quick to see stubbornness in others. What's really going on?

The degree to which we resist change is a function of the amount of control we think we have over it. The amount of control determines whether we focus more on the potential benefits or potential losses.

When we are championing change, we focus on the advantages that will result from that change. We believe it will provide a better way forward. It is hard to see why others are skeptical or dubious about a future we see so clearly.

Things are different when we feel change is being forced upon us. Someone else is championing the change and we feel the fear of uncertainty. We focus on what we're giving up and the 'unfairness' of having little or no control. These are the times when others see us as stubborn.

Resistance is a natural response to confusion (fear of the unknown, lack of information) and chaos (lack of control, instability). Understanding this dynamic leads to strategies for being more effective in leading change as well as for responding to change initiated by others.

Things to do when leading change:

As the change champion, we find it frustrating when others do not share our dedication and enthusiasm to pursue it. Here are some strategies that help reduce



Listen. Ask questions such as, "How do you think this change will directly affect you?" "Do you see any issues in the change?" or "I'd like to hear what you think." You cannot deal with resistance you don't see or hear. Ignoring resistance does not make it go away. It will eventually resurface, often in a much stronger form that is harder to handle.

other people's resistance to the change:

- Give people as much information as possible. Reveal your thinking behind the change. Specify 'what' will change and 'why' the change is necessary. Providing information reduces others' need to speculate about the rationale (often from a fear perspective).
- Clearly communicate your vision of the benefits of the change. Keep in mind their WIIFM "What's in it for me?" factor.
- Be open and available to answer questions. Encourage people to voice their concerns to you so you have an opportunity to respond (more on this below). You want to reduce the need for them to raise their objections to each other at the water cooler.
- Speak about the change as a positive response to the future rather than as a correction for what's been done in the past. Resist criticizing how things were done before; instead talk about how the change is necessary going forward.
- Clearly communicate the future consequences of not changing. Let people know the price to be paid for keeping things just as they are. (Don't threaten, simply inform.)
- Give people as much time as possible to adjust to the fact that change is coming. Often people who initially resist change will warm up to it in time.
- Encourage people to participate in making decisions about HOW the change will be implemented. This will reduce their sense of helplessness and give you access to creative ideas from the people most responsible for getting the outcomes you want from the change.

As with all communication, we will be more successful if we know our audience. Get in the 'ear' of the receiver – what will he or she home in on? This knowledge will help you avoid inadvertently alarming or irritating the listener. Look to your understanding of the DISC and PIAV models to help:

Behavioural Style Differences

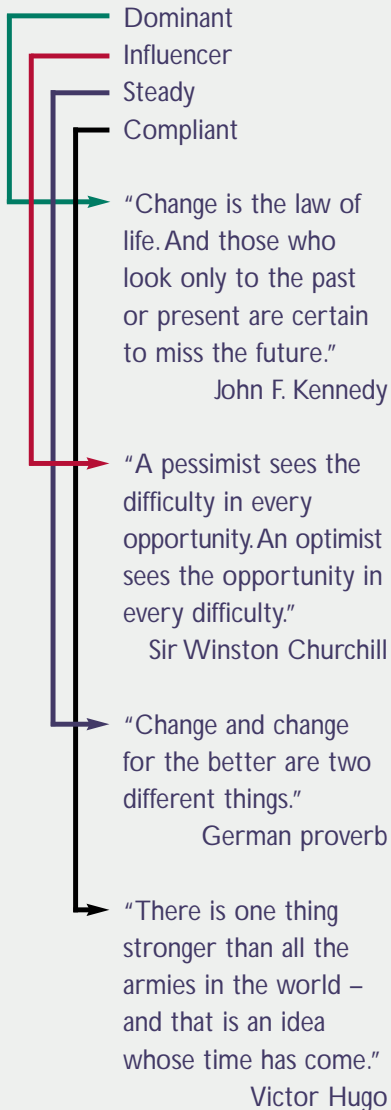
Change is risky. Some people are more risk-averse than others (Core S – Steady and Core C – Compliant styles). These people will require extra support as they expose themselves to potential failure or loss of quality while learning new methods or skills.

People with Core D-Dominant and Core I-Influencer styles are often called "change-agents" because they are more risk-tolerant. Look to these people to help you get the ball rolling.



People with the Core S -Steady style are uncomfortable speaking up directly, especially if the person leading the change has a direct communication style. Try to create ways for them to safely

Quotes on change for each DISC style:



communicate their concerns (perhaps via small group discussions). Then find a way to bring answers to their concerns to the public light. People with this behavioural style are supportive by nature and will implement the change if the vision and logic behind it are sound.

Personal Interests, Attitudes and Values™ differences:

People who have the Traditional attitude in #1 or #2 position value loyalty to ways of doing things that have worked in the past and find it harder to be open to new approaches. Time and patience will help them adjust to change.

People who have the Aesthetics attitude high may have a ‘picture’ in their mind of how things should be. Expect them to resist if your vision of the future that necessitates the change does not coincide with theirs.

People with the Utilitarian attitude in a high position will be persuaded by arguments that speak to the usefulness of the change, or how it will increase efficiency.

For people with the Individualistic Attitude high, a sense of power and control is especially important.

How to respond to change initiated by others:

When you notice that you’re resisting change imposed on you, it is often because you haven’t been given the information you need to reduce your fears and help you see the benefits.

If the person initiating the change is not skilled in communicating the vision, you will need to probe for information without appearing to be defensive. People need feedback that communication efforts need more clarity. Try:

“It is easier for me to implement change if I am clear about the issues that make it necessary. Can you help me understand more about the reasoning behind the change?”



Getting answers to your questions is great in theory – it's often harder in practice, especially if you are uncomfortable speaking up. Developing your assertive skills will help you communicate without fear. Work with a coach on this goal.

"I'm not yet clear about what will be changing and what will remain the same. I realize not everything will have been decided yet, but can you give me the broad brushstrokes?"

"How soon will these changes begin?"

This is not the time to debate the wisdom of adopting the change. Nor is it in your best interests to be perceived as not getting on board a train that has already left the station. It is fine to raise the potential roadblocks you foresee so long as you offer recommendations for removing them. Position yourself as a creative problem-solver, not a nay-sayer:

"Is there an opportunity for me to help work out the details of how the change will be implemented?"

"I anticipate that _____ could result from the change. If that happens, I recommend we _____."

If after learning the answers to these questions you still do not want to support the change, it is wise to review your employment options. If you decide that you want or need to stay in the organization, you will have to find ways to get involved in the change so that your ideas and issues see the light of day. This is not easy, but for those who do, work life becomes a much happier experience.

Helpful Resources:

- <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu> - a free service of the Wharton School of Business. The website contains current articles by top authors in many areas of business and management including leadership and change.
- <http://pippo.emeraldinsight.com/rpsv/jocm.htm> - online home of the Journal of Organizational Change Management
- www.change-management.org - includes collection of articles posted by consultants, book list, best practices, benchmarking tools, links.
- *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*
William Bridges (1991)
- *Communicating Change: Winning Employee Support for New Business Goals*
T.J. Larkin and Sandar Larkin (1994)

**Would you like to recommend a book or resource?
Please just send a review and why you like it and we'll post your recommendation!**