

ALL CHANGE!

Resistance to change is seen as a major challenge to organisational initiatives. But do staff really resist change or do we just think they do?

There are lots of reactions that look like resistance, but are in fact something else:

- 1) When presented with new information the brain asks: How is this relevant to me? Do I need to engage? Is it interesting? Fail to stimulate a 'yes' to any of these and the information won't register with the conscious brain and so no behaviour change takes place. This can be labelled resistance.
- 2) The information might trigger a defensive emotional reaction, commonly known as the fight, flight or freeze response. These can be interpreted as 'resistance to change'.
- 3) There may be an organisational history of change badly done or of ineffectual change initiatives. This can trigger a 'they're crying wolf' response or a 'heads down and this too will pass' reaction.
- 4) Organisations and people can suffer from change fatigue. Change takes energy and overworked, stressed people can be incapable of responding positively – even if they think it's a good idea.
- 5) Sometimes there is a good reason to push back. Others may be able to see things that the change originators can't. They can easily be misheard as protecting their own situation. In this case their legitimate objections are discounted and they are labelled resisters.

Why your staff are resisting change and how to encourage them to embrace it. By Sarah Lewis, managing director and principal psychologist at Appreciating Change

- 6) Sometimes, even if the change 'makes sense' people will delay. For example, the need to deliver bad news – they may accept the need but delay the action. This looks like resistance.
- 7) They may not have the brain capacity. Building new habits takes a lot of 'brain power' – which may already be being used to cope with fast changing situations. That's why we delay instigating that new exercise regime until we're less busy and have time to think!

So, how can we encourage people to embrace change?

- 1) **Acknowledge the impact.** Recognise that making changes takes time and energy.
- 2) **Acknowledge previous bad experiences.** Use them as a springboard for discussing how to make this a better experience.
- 3) **Involve people in identifying the need and designing the response to change.** Appreciative inquiry is a good example

'Remove hurdles so that doing the new thing right is the path of least resistance'

of a methodology that creates these opportunities.

- 4) **Incorporate their intelligence.** By engaging early with those affected you're able make use of their detailed local knowledge, and are in a better position to assess their motivations in raising different issues.
- 5) **Engage people's positive future oriented emotions rather than triggering their blocking ones.** Co-creating ideas of how the future can be releases this pull motivational energy.
- 6) **Actively support the creation of new behaviour habits making it easy to do the new thing:**
 - a. Remove hurdles so that doing the new thing right is the path of least resistance.
 - b. Give frequent, small positive rewards for doing the right thing.
 - c. Give this lots of attention.
 - d. Make it routine. Have reminders everywhere.
- 7) **Switch to more psychologically based change.** Use methods such as Appreciative Inquiry, World Café and Open Space.

By understanding the reasons for resistance and using the advice above to help your team embrace the desired change, you will find that new behaviours and systems will be integrated faster and more effectively. **nb**

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