

PSYCHOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONAL RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

GOAL

To identify the behavior and reason for resistive behaviors within the organizational setting

CONTENT FOR APPLICATION

Organizational Behavior
Organizational Success
Organizational Failure
Organizational Standards
Organizational Problems
Organizational Resistance
Organizational Excuses for Behavior
Organizational Positive Change Suggestions

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CHANGE RESISTANCE

The psychology of change resistance refers to people experiencing emotional anxiety at the prospect of change or transformation that is to take place.

THE OBSERVATIONS OF SUCCESS VERSUS FAILURE

Scenario #1: There is nothing quite like it—watching and experiencing the success of an organization as group/committee/board members work diligently together side by side, cooperatively, to meet mutual standards of the organization—philosophy, mission, goals, objectives, policies, and everyone meeting their job description/performance standards/code of ethics.

Scenario #2: Conversely, watching and experiencing the failure of an organization as group/committee/board members who are unwilling to work diligently together to meet mutual standards of the organization presents the image of a “Crash and Burn” mentality. There is an obvious lack of acceptance related to the opportunity for organizational success. Organizational leaders and constituents thwart their positive existence and organizational duty. They refuse to take advantage of well-known leadership facts and behavior that lead to administrative and organizational success. The consequences are dysfunction, chaos, and often the complete dissolution of the organization.

As one group/committee/board (Scenario #1) moves toward a gleeful organizational success for those they represent, the other group/committee/board (Scenario #2) moves toward the abyss. Different outcomes are quite something to witness—with different organizational responses and predictable leadership outcomes. It is truly something to see—leadership success causing positive emotional elation or leadership failure causing anger and frustration. Constituents observe choices of voted-for and/or

paid decision-makers/leaders determining organizational outcomes that influence life changes for all concerned.

THE OBSERVATIONS OF LEADERSHIP RESISTANCE

Understanding human behavior is complicated. Observations in scenario #2 relate to the resistance to positive change by showing evidence of Passive Aggressive behavioral tendencies —indirect anger, resistance, and frustration.

Passive Aggressive organizational leaders show evidence of one or more of the following:

1. A tendency to stick to the negative and non-productive status quo unless the significant constituent forces require Scientific Skepticism, Critical Thinking, and Common Sense to be incorporated into the decision-making process.
2. The constituent's desires and input regarding the organization are ignored.
3. A tendency to act passively unless a decision or outcome affects them personally.
4. The influence of an existing passive personality trait, life history drama, or an unexpressed negative situation.
5. A lack of motivation.

The visual scene of Passive Aggression resistance with leaders or constituents:

Do you recognize this visual scene of resistance with leaders or constituents? Faces visibly frown, chairs are pushed away from the table, and the room is filled with unbecoming verbal remarks. They are one collective body of constituents with voted-for and/or paid leaders of an organization who are determined not to participate in what they have decided to be “nonsense” as an organizational necessity. Scientific Skepticism, Critical Thinking, and Common Sense (the Three Amigos) are not pursued by the constituents/group/committee/board members as a necessary intellectual activity to enhance decisions for positive change. The result could easily be an organization actively deteriorating from the lack of reasonable interventions that will cause collaborative organizational success.

There could be many reasons for the refusal to accept such proven “gifts” of organizational success. Could lack of intelligence be the main reason—or is it resistive stubbornness and an unfortunate attitude to accept that numerous other organizations have embraced leadership academic theories (without Passive Aggressive behaviors) to produce organizational success?

Definition of Intellect: The ability of the human mind to reach correct conclusions regarding what is true or false and how to solve problems.

Choice of behavior (active or passive) might be an intelligent choice or just what feels good at the time. Or--could it be just one of the many other permeating social variables often present in a group/committee/board? That is, they choose to support the group/each other in negative behaviors collectively rather than intellectually embrace what has already been proven *many times* in other organizations as the path to organizational success.

Albert Einstein reminds us that:

“THE MEASURE OF INTELLIGENCE IS THE ABILITY TO CHANGE”

The well-known author, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, identified the progression of resistive human responses to changes in life—including organizational change. The progression is as follows:

1. Shock Phase: The initial phase of no reaction that gives the initial impression that a person has accepted the change. It is a time of taking-in of the change information. It can result in an anxiety crisis, resistance, or other physical reactions.
2. Negative Phase: The change is denied, with behavior often continuing as if nothing has happened. By returning to everyday routines, the feelings of control are recovered.
3. Phase of Wrath: The change can no longer be denied, so it is common to be angry and frustrated and to experience rage and resistance. All repressed feelings during the previous phases emerge. Then the big question comes, “Why should this happen to me/us/this organization?”
4. Phase of Negotiation: There is an effort to find a way out—so resistance occurs. Struggling against accepting the change, ignoring the change, or changing the outcome is usually worthless. So—there is an effort to avoid or ignore the change.
5. Phase of Depression: The change is recognized as inevitable, but the change is not accepted. The result is depression or irritation.
6. Phase of the Test: Resistance to change is finally disappearing because a *reaction* to the change is necessary. New coping mechanisms are beginning to fit the reality of the change. The new non-resistive thinking and experiments relative to the change allow a new perspective related to the change.
7. Phase of Acceptance: Balance and equilibrium return that we lost with the change. We adapt by rebuilding our identity relative to the change.

When the astute leader understands these natural changes in other leaders and constituents, it improves the ability to be intellectual about the happenings and move forward with leadership confidence.

THE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS REGARDING RESISTANCE

Why do group/committee/board members respond with overt resistance? The good excuses are exceptionally few. Historical research has proven that individuals (leaders and constituents) with supposed high Intellectual Quotients (I.Q.) often revert to their theories before using Common Sense! What is so powerful within a human being to cause the dismissal of Common Sense and the responsibility given to them by vote and/or pay? Is there so much personal need for personal control and pride in their perceived intimate knowledge and ability that there is good cause to refuse organizational suggestions of leadership that historically have been proven to provide organizational success?

Definition of Common Sense: The sound, practical, or reasonable judgments shared by or are common to most people. It is based on a simple basic perception or understanding of the situation and facts—not on specialized knowledge.

By watching the resistive behavior of leaders and constituents, the logical question becomes apparent. The question is: Could a group/committee/board's positive participation with potential for organizational success be desired? It might take some profound methods of leadership change to accomplish this expected/desired positive goal of organizational success. The most significant change—perhaps—is attitude!?

THE POSSIBLE ANSWERS/EXCUSES FOR RESISTANCE

The reasons a person/group/committee/board organization refuses to be helped toward evidence of success could be many and varied. The intellectual challenge and choice of the behavior of each leader and constituent may be different—often resulting in the same negative outcome—resistance to positive change(s). The recognized possible personal reasons/excuses for resistance to change include (but are not limited to):

- They own their ideas like property—and who wants to give up personal property to help the organization?
- They have pride in their perceived ability to maintain the organizational situation to their liking.
- They do not want interference and want to retain their freedom of independent thought regardless of the organizational consequences.
- They don't want to be known as accepting (from their perspective) "charity information."
- They don't want to be " beholden " to anybody.
- They don't like to risk accepting another person's input—even if it includes history to show successful organizational outcomes.
- They have learned through life experiences a lack of trust in other people and researched/proven information.
- They are historically known to control all situations to their liking instead of the concern for organizational needs or constituent outcomes.
- They have a misdirected Moral Compass (ability or desire to judge what is right and wrong and act accordingly).
- They do not "handle" change well—including new ideas and attempted redirection of thoughts and behavior.
- They love the unique power role of a group/committee/board member rather than the personal responsibility to assure the entire organization's success.
- They dislike the situation, the suggestions, and especially YOU—because YOU represent change!
- They were voted into the position as leaders and/or paid to do the leadership job, which (they believe) allows them the right to make personal decisions regardless of the needs of the constituents or the organization.
- They are fearful of failure or change.
- They feel the timelines for change are unrealistic.

- They feel it infringes on their personal lives—e.g., a schedule interrupting family or other work-perceived responsibilities.

Emotional resistance is often the result of immaturity, inexperience in coping, frustration, fear, distrust, and shock related to the expectation to change. The most common form of emotional resistance is frustration.

THE SUGGESTIONS FOR ERADICATING RESISTANCE AND PROMOTING POSITIVE CHANGE

The Organization:

Developing a functioning organization is like building a house, and there needs to be a foundation FIRST. The organization's foundation is called Standards, and leaders and constituents develop standards to provide the organization's foundation.

Changing organizational behavior takes time to calm the frustration, fear, distrust, and shock associated with the need to change.

Standards include the following:

- Philosophy: What is your belief about the existence of an organization?
- Mission/Purpose: Why does the organization exist?
- Long-Term Goal(s): What do you intend to finally (in the long run) accomplish?
- Short-Term Goal(s): What do you incrementally intend to achieve as "Steppingstones" to meet the Long-Term Goal(s)?
- Policies: What are the organizational behaviors that maintain the total functioning of the organization?
- Rules of Engagement: How does a constituent present and respond to information or questions in an acceptable, respectful, and courteous manner?
- Job Descriptions/Performance Standards/Code of Ethics: What are the expectations of each role in the organization? What are the cognitive/intellectual, psychomotor/performance, and affective/attitude expectations? (See Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy online)

People tend to continue to do what has worked for them. Some people watch the leader and tend to respond and mimic the leader's response to change—so appropriate leader behavior according to a known job description is necessary.

The Leader:

- It is wise to make changes slowly in small increments at a time.
- Constituents submitting organizational questions for discussion should be requested (by the constituent's job description) to do so several days before each organizational meeting. The time granted for considering each question will often encourage a correct response and, if appropriate, incremental positive change(s) without a crisis. This given time may be written as a part of the policies or Rules of Engagement—encouraging appropriate input, decreasing a need for arguing, and promoting support and courtesy for all in attendance.

- The leader and followers continue to consider from past group outcomes what has been proven experientially to meet (or not meet) organizational success—and maybe in communities elsewhere.
- Encourage a discussion of the definition and example between Parallel Play and Cooperative Endeavors by giving examples of past Cooperative Endeavors of group/committee/board members' behavior and ultimate successes. Emphasize successes and not failures.
- Thank individuals verbosely who provide appropriate responses --- ignoring negative responses.
- Bring forth the definition and positive example of the Cooperative Endeavor Concept (working together to accomplish their goals). Identify that such cooperative behavior is expected and acceptable! Also, in contrast, identify the definition and negative example of the Parallel Behavior Concept. Recognize and complement group Cooperative Endeavors openly.

Definition of Cooperative Endeavor: There is energetic involvement, collaborative conversation, and a final collective commitment to the standards of the organization and any relative positive change. This behavior by leaders and constituents show a positive attempt to comply with successful problem-solving group behaviors.

Cooperative Endeavor behavior by a leader means an attempt to encourage all leaders and constituents to participate consistently in the development, performance, and evaluation of the organizational expectations without resistance.

Definition of Parallel Behavior: There is no positive movement toward a change in the mutual determination or meeting of organizational standards-- (philosophy, mission, goals, objectives, policies, or job descriptions). People interact superficially with each other and do not try to problem-solve or influence each other.

- Meet regularly and as per scheduled meetings. Suppose the organization's president is unavailable to attend and control the meeting. In that case, the vice president will do the exact group process according to the president's job description. This same responsibility is indicated in the vice president's job description.
- Have organizational policies, Rules of Engagement, email addresses and names of leaders responsible for administrative activities, staff and office phone numbers, and other general information in convenient and specific locations—website, bulletin boards, office, on the bill for service.
- Communicate with constituents and leaders early, often, openly, and honestly.
- Share relevant information about the reason for a change.
- Educate about the value of change.
- Provide ongoing support.

- Include other leaders and constituents in the change plan(s).
- Reward compliant leaders and constituents.
- Update/maintain all written documents to include changes.

Effective leadership encourages a Cooperative Endeavor of all leaders and constituents.

Realize that people are different in their ability and tolerance to change and need the consistency of repetitive behaviors for mental stability. Such recognition and appropriate response to the ability/inability of each person to accommodate change and provide necessary support is one of the signs of outstanding leadership!

There is a common ground for group discussion when organizational standards exist and are reviewed as a reminder at the first of each meeting. Always expect maintenance of consistent and appropriate behavior—Entropy will occur otherwise.

Entropy: A universal concept reminding us that ALL THINGS move toward randomness unless controlled with expected/required behaviors—consistently!

There are many other reasons that individuals and groups can use as a covert or overt excuse to be resistive and not practice successful organizational behaviors. Oft times, the true reasons for not using expert advice, researched study results, Scientific Skepticism, Critical Thinking, or Common Sense (the Three Amigos) result from superficial thinking (or not thinking) that meets their personal need for power. It is an attempt to remain in control rather than meeting the collective survival needs of the organization.

CONCLUSION: Human behavior is always interesting. Expecting *everybody* to stay true to the organizational standards eliminates the temptation to use resistive behaviors.

Try to find the good in having the opportunity to make positive changes—regardless of the descent or resistance. Positive attitudes are catching and are more likely to be accepted without resistance if approached kindly, thoughtfully, and professionally. The solution is for the leader to be consistent, informative, understanding, supportive, and helpful to the *entire* organization in the move to more positive outcomes, better choices, and improved organizational situations.

“I CANNOT CHANGE THE DIRECTION OF THE WIND, BUT I CAN ADJUST MY SAILS TO ALWAYS REACH MY DESTINATION.” (Jimmy Dean)

“REAL CHANGE, ENDURING CHANGE, HAPPENS ONE STEP AT A TIME.” (Ruth Bader Ginsberg)

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AUTHOR: Carolyn Taylor, Ed.D. M.N.