

2.1 Introduction to human resource management

Strategies for reducing the impact of change and resistance to change

‘You can’t teach an old dog new tricks’ is a well-known old saying, which implies that often the impediments to change, in a business or in other contexts, come from within.

Reasons for resistance to change

There are a number of reasons why employees in an organisation may resist change:

Self-interest

This is when an employee believes that their own interest is different from the organisation’s objectives. The employee may resist change because it will have negative consequences for their own wellbeing or goals.

Low tolerance

Many, though not all, people prefer an environment of order and stability. Change means that there will be new ways of doing things, and it will require adaptation from employees. People may be fearful of change. Instead of seeing change as an opportunity for growth, employees may view change as a situation filled with unpredictability and problems.

Misinformation

If the reasons behind the change are not communicated clearly, employees may feel uneasy about it. Perhaps they think there is no good reason for any change and so act to block the change.

Interpretations of circumstances

People can have different perceptions of a situation. Employees may believe that management does not know what it is doing. Again, if the reasons for the change are not communicated clearly, then misunderstandings can arise.



Figure 1. Misinformation can lead to resistance to change.

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Human resource strategies for dealing with change

How can managers or human resource departments deal with change in a way that is positive and non-threatening? This is a daunting task that requires effort and finesse. Essentially, the methodology needs to include ways to get agreement from employees about accepting change; it is important that changes to be made are planned, timed and communicated to employees clearly.

Change can make people nervous. So there are strategies that a human resource manager can use to try to minimise the negative reactions to change.



Figure 2. Human resource strategies for dealing with change in the workplace.

Participation

It is important to include the employee in discussions, both formal and informal, about the types of change that might be coming. This would include having sessions where employees can ask questions and be part of the process of change. Managers can also create a team from a cross section of the company (depending on the size of the change being initiated) so that all levels of employee input can be sought and considered. This will help to reduce any employee concerns, because there will be a systematic mechanism in place for management to access employee information and feedback. Employee participation, including democratic decision-making, is considered a key strategy for increasing motivation in the workplace. You will learn more about democratic leadership in [Subtopic 2.3 \(/study/app/y12-business-management-a-sl-may-2024/sid-352-cid-174703/book/the-big-picture-id-39554\)](https://app.kognity.com/study/app/y12-business-management-a-sl-may-2024/sid-352-cid-174703/book/the-big-picture-id-39554) and motivation in [Subtopic](#)

[2.4 \(/study/app/y12-business-management-a-sl-may-2024/sid-352-cid-174703/book/the-big-picture-id-39559\)](https://study/app/y12-business-management-a-sl-may-2024/sid-352-cid-174703/book/the-big-picture-id-39559). Participation in decision-making, however, does not completely eliminate resistance, and overcoming employee concerns can take time.

Planning

Changes need to be planned and managed carefully. Time must be allowed for employees to understand the changes being implemented and to feel ownership for themselves because they have been included in the change process. By implementing change in stages, feedback is available in stages too, and management can react accordingly at each stage. The bigger the change, the more important that management has feedback loops built in so that it is aware of employee concerns. As with participation, planning takes time and can slow the change that needs to occur.



Figure 3. Implementing changes in stages can help minimise negative reactions to change.

Credit: Vertigo3d, Getty Images

Communication

Changes need to be communicated regularly. This means that all stakeholders are kept informed at each phase of the change taking place. When problems are identified, managers need to communicate that they are aware of the problems and are working on resolving them. It is also important to communicate the positive aspects of the changes so that concerned stakeholders are aware of the progress being made. Good communication is not always easy, so human resource managers need to have training in good communication strategies to help ensure success at overcoming resistance to change.

Negotiation

Managers could use the ‘carrot approach’ in limiting and restricting any resistance to change. This means they could provide incentives to employees before, during or after the change occurs. Amendments in contracts can be made to incentivise staff. Despite this, some staff may still resist change. If they cannot adapt, they may be offered early retirement or redundancy incentives to make way for those who are more open to change.

Manipulation

Representatives of employees resisting change can be invited for a dialogue by the management. The purpose of this is to convince and influence the representative towards the change. Those representatives may then have influence over a wider group of employees. This approach needs to be taken carefully, however, because manipulation can be viewed as unethical.

Coercion

This is the last approach the management should use with employees resisting change. Sometimes managers can bully employees and force them to accept change by threatening them with dismissal, redundancy, disciplinary action or redeployment, or by removing promotion opportunities. Due to working contracts, this type of approach is done implicitly rather than explicitly, because it can be unethical or even illegal.

There is no one right way to go about implementing change. However, there are ways to make change more manageable. Inclusion, trust, open communication and a supportive employee-oriented environment will be important in ensuring that the change undertaken has a good chance of success.

Activity

Learner Profile: Knowledgeable
Approaches to Learning: Thinking skills (critical thinking)

Create a table, as shown here, of each method of overcoming resistance to change. Complete the table by adding an advantage and disadvantage for each method.

Strategy	Advantage	Disadvantage
Participation		

Strategy	Advantage	Disadvantage
Planning		
Communication		
Negotiation		
Manipulation		
Coercion		

Theory of Knowledge

Poor leaders and managers may not be skilled at managing change in their organisations. This is especially true when there is pressure to make change quickly. In these situations, leaders and managers may not want to use the more time-consuming strategies of participation, planning, communication and negotiation. Instead they may go straight for manipulation and coercion.

- What are the practical and ethical implications of resorting to manipulation and coercion in order to bring about change in an organisation? Is it ever a good idea to use these strategies?