

Managing Resistance to Change



Since it is natural for human beings to resist change, the main problem in introducing and implementing change is to overcome resistance to change. Efforts for overcoming resistance to change can be made both at the individual level and the group level. The main strategies that can be used to overcome resistance to change are given below:

1. Education and Communication

One of the simplest techniques to overcome resistance to change is to inform people about the change. People can be educated to become familiar with the nature and process of change. Counseling and training can be used to change the basic values and attitudes of people. Communication is very useful because many people resist change due to lack of information or misunderstanding. While communicating change, a manager should explain:

- a) What the change is?
- b) Why the change is needed?
- c) When it is to be introduced?
- d) How it will be implemented?
- e) How the change will be beneficial to all?

This would help people to visualize the need for and logic of change. They would appreciate the change much better and will accept it easily. The main advantage of this method is that once convinced people, themselves would help in the implementation of change. However, it is a time-consuming method and requires continuous education of those affected by the change.

2. Participation and Involvement

Employees or their representatives may be invited to participate in discussions relating to the proposed change. If they are given a role in designing the change, they are likely to cooperate with the management in implementing the change.

3. Facilitation and Support

Easing the change process and providing support for those caught up in it is another way managers can deal with resistance to change. These include listening, providing guidance, allowing time off after a difficult period, and offering facilitative and emotional support. Facilitative support means removing physical barriers in implementing change by providing appropriate training, tools, materials, etc. Emotional support is provided by showing personal concerns to the subordinates during periods of stress and strains.

4. Negotiation and Agreement

Negotiation with resisters and offering them incentives may be a useful technique for overcoming resistance. Examples are union agreements, promotion of nominees of the union, increased economic benefits to employees, etc. It may become relatively easy to avoid major resistance through negotiation.

5. Manipulation and Co-optation

Sometimes, managers covertly steer individuals or groups away from resistance to change. They may manipulate workers by releasing information selectively or by consciously structuring the sequence of events. Or they may co-opt an individual, perhaps a key person within a group, by giving him or her a desirable role in designing or carrying out the change process. Aside from the doubtful ethics of such techniques, they may also backfire.

6. Explicit and Implicit Coercion

Managers may force people to go along with a change by explicit or implicit threats involving loss of jobs, lack of promotion and the like. Managers may dismiss or transfer employees who stand in the way of change. As with manipulation and co-option, such methods, though not uncommon, are risky and make it more difficult to gain support for future change efforts.

Overcoming resistance to change will involve pursuing more than one of the above techniques. Which techniques to employ, and how to translate them into effective actions, will depend on the specifics of the situation.