

Managing Change & Technology

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Let go of the Past
PdJ*

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11 TIPS TO TOPPLE RESISTANCE

When you've dug yourself into the deep dark pit of 'Buy-in'.

What to do when you can't do it right?

Managed properly, most organizational change is a relatively painless activity. When we create an environment that naturally assumes, from the start, that employees are an active and integral part of the solution process, we avoid the situations where we have to seek 'Buy-in'.

For example: If a department is aware of the security risks they face when allowing clients to access online databases, they will demand both regular audit processes, and the installation of more secure systems. In other words they will act in their own best interest regardless of the resulting changes to their way of doing business.

But, unfortunately, most of the change that takes place in organizations follows a different approach. An IT manager will become aware of unintentional security weaknesses and then impose a security audit and increased security measures. This is ALSO done in the best interests of the organization, but is done 'to' a department, rather than 'with' that department. This is somewhat more than a semantical difference. This difference in approach changes the nature of the change into something more confrontational.

But what if you're the one between the person dictating the change must take place, and the department about to be changed? What if you've been 'appointed' by your manager to bring the PR department into line? It's now your job to audit their new website and impose the new security and privacy standards.

What if the preferred approach of getting 'them' to approach you with the idea of an audit, is no longer an option? They've already been told to expect you on Monday, 9:00 a.m. sharp to set a schedule for the audit and resulting system upgrades and changes to procedures. Now what?

This, unfortunately, is how we manage change in most corporate environments. We dig ourselves into deep dark pits and then ask for help getting ourselves out of them. Being told NOT to dig these deep dark pits in the first place, is not the advice we want to hear... even though it is perhaps the best possible advice available.

So... we're in the deep dark pit of our own, or at least management's construction... How do we overcome the tall dank walls of resistance we're facing?

Here are ten strategies, connected in various ways, that deal with the situation on your plate.

1) Accept the fact they've the right to resist imposed change.

Part of Einstein's genius was his ability to conduct rigorous 'gedanken experiments' or 'thought experiments'. He used the results of these experiments to steer his research. That's exactly what we're going to do to 'prove' the existence of this 'right to resist'.

MC&T is a free monthly ezine distributed in the PDF format which you've chosen to receive. Part of this arrangement is that I do not make your e-mails available to anyone else. This is our current 'status quo', or... the way things are today. Regardless of whatever flaws this arrangement might contain, we've both come to accept it.

What if, from now on, it will be delivered daily? Or... I'll be selling your e-mail IDs to a SPAM site? Or... in the interest of adding some variety I'll be adding 5 pages each month on gardening and cooking tips? Or... from now on it will be published only in hard copy and the corporate subscription cost is \$750.00/annum?

Each one of these proposed phony changes would result in a flurry of unsubs, angry e-mails and possibly even a handful of lawsuits. These would all reflect the level of resistance you have to the proposed changes.

The point of the experiment? I'd be extremely foolish NOT to expect this type of response to these types of changes. Especially since I have not involved you in the reasons for the changes, or worse, in possible solutions to whatever problems I think would justify these changes.

We have the right to ask 'why?' in response to any change. Resistance to imposed change is natural.

Here's a prediction... even though these are all phony changes, none of which are being planned (Except I have this GREAT Chili recipe!) I will receive at least one e-mail asking me why I'm going to make one of these changes.

2) Create an environment where it's safe to voice concern about an impending change.

In order to deal with resistance it is important to understand what is causing it. If the channels of communication are closed, then there is no hope of achieving any level of understanding.

We know this. This is why Embassies are 'sacred ground'... Diplomats can say and do practically anything they want without reprisal. Embassies are kept open to provide a communications channel even when every other relationship between two countries has been severed.

Yet, despite this proven understanding that safe communication is vital to the resolution of conflict, organizations ignore this wisdom.

Speaking out against a change in nearly any organization is subject to varying degrees of 'reprisal' -- anything from "you're not a team player" to a speedy dismissal.

3) Listen to what they have to say.

Once they're talking... listen! Resistance to change, is the act of attempting to prevent the loss of some part of the status quo. One of the biggest mistakes we make is we assume we know what people are trying to protect. That's seldom true.

Going back to our thought experiment as a source of ideas on this, we have the following:

Under each phony change are different reasons people might resist it.

Daily delivery of MC&T?

Don't mind this if the mailings were smaller.

Too much to read already.

Don't mind this if they were all available on the web instead.

Making e-mail IDs available to a SPAM site?

Don't mind this provided these are not pornography sites.

I live in the UK... would not mind UK SPAM.

If this doesn't generate more than 10 messages a week, I'm OK with it.

5 pages each month on gardening and cooking tips?

Hate gardening... travel tips instead?

I subscribed for change issues only.

You get the idea. Every resister to the change will have a slightly different take on what they would and wouldn't like to see change. There is seldom a single reason for resistance.

4) Respect what they have to say.

Place no value judgment on the reasons they provide for resisting. These are their reasons. This, by itself, makes them valid. This is the reality you have to overcome.

Telling someone their reason is 'invalid' will not change their perspective, although it makes it very clear to them that you don't respect their opinion. This increases their reluctance to take guidance from you. That's just another form of 'resistance'.

5) Agree with their concerns.

This is that extra step beyond just 'respecting' what they have to say. It acknowledges that they might be 100% correct. This is not a matter of backing down from your position, it's merely the calming power of the statement: "You might be right".

6) Respond to what they have to say.

Every change contains some leeway. How can their now legitimized concerns be accommodated by the proposed change? Every movement in their direction does a great deal to communicate you do care, and lowers the barriers of resistance at least a little bit.

7) Communicate what is causing the necessity of the Change.

Even change over which we have no control, deserves an explanation.

If sales are bad, let them see the figures.

If competition is increasing, show them how.

If the old system is failing, or insecure, or costing too much in maintenance, then explain it to the staff so they understand why the change is necessary,

A lot of the resistance we encounter springs from the simple desire to know why something is happening. People don't like being kept in the dark. Information is the best anti-dark potion we have at our disposal.

8) Communicate the alternatives you've considered.

Sometimes change seems arbitrary. "Why this particular solution? Why at this point in time?" are two common questions. Being able to present to a target audience a body of work and thought that has gone into this change, demonstrates very effectively the thought process behind a change.

9) Communicate the advantages of this choice.

Why is this change a good one? What benefits will it deliver? Not only to the company but to the people affected by it.

10) Communicate the dis-advantages of this choice.

No solution is perfect. To pretend otherwise is seen for what it is, a lie. Nothing is more guaranteed to instill increased resistance in a community than the notion that there are no risks, no downsides to a proposed change. Stating flaws in the plan, identifying weaknesses in the process has the peculiar effect of increasing trust and confidence.

The challenge for anyone involved in implementing change is to admit that this is NOT the most perfect of situations. Ironically it's the one thing that is most likely to get people on your side. Especially, if you enlist their help to fill the gaps.

11) Communicate what will NOT change.

Finally: What won't change? What parts of what they've come to expect, perhaps even taken for granted, will stay exactly the same?

Sometimes a reminder that the change will make sure the company remains financially healthy is all it takes to calm the real fear in the pit of everyone's stomach... "Will I keep my job?"

RESPONSE TO ANTI-MOUSE ARTICLE.

I'll keep this short. I received about 30 responses to my review of "Who Moved my Cheese". I was surprised that the overwhelming response was in agreement with my take on the book.

Out of the 30 responses, only one was in total disagreement, two were 'neutral' and the remainder? Violently in agreement. By that I mean, not only did they state "Yes, I agree" but they were more along the line of "It's about time someone took a swing at that book".

Given the degree of agreement, I've decided to let the matter rest. I do not wish it to become a "PdJ was right" argument. I thought the book had a lot of good things to say, but I also thought it was pro-management, anti-employee & anti-thinking. This bothered me.

CULTURE... IT'S HOW WE DO THINGS AROUND HERE.

by Bea Rigby

A couple of years ago, I watched an unsuccessful acquisition (one of those unions-of-equals that really was a buyout) -- I looked at the new parent company and decided I didn't fit their culture. I ended up leaving, starting an independent consulting corporation -- and though it has different stresses, it was the right decision for me.

Culture is the assumptions that people make about "how we do things" -- and it is pervasive -- how is a meeting called? Is it acceptable to be late to a meeting? Who takes notes? Are there minutes? Who is responsible for them? If I send an e-mail, must I CC my boss, BC my boss? Can I go to lunch @ 11:30 or 1 without letting anyone know? How are disciplinary matters handled, publicly or privately (or passive-aggressively, as the case may be)? What are the ethics of the company (not the STATED ones, the ones that matter when there's a nuts & bolts decision to be made)? How consistent are "the rules" applied (among the team, between teams, between levels of the organization)?

One of the things I enjoy about being a consultant is that for each new project I get to do new assignment analysis -- I come into an organization and try to ramp-up to their culture as rapidly as possible. I can ask for the expectations, and sometimes they are obvious as I look around at how the rest of the work group behaves. The advantage I have is that I have a project focus, and less of a career focus than the employees I work with/for -- I

enjoy being "on the outside", so I can be amused at the sometimes petty politics, rather than painfully upset because it is MY life, my identity, my permanent future.

I think people can adapt to a fairly wide band of cultures -- the most stress on an individual worker seems to come when one or more of the following takes place:

When Culture is inconsistent.

Pockets of the company behave differently, or yesterday's rules don't work today, and you're not sure why...

When Culture is hypocritical.

The company slogan and mission statement are widely published, but ignored when the rubber meets the road -- this inconsistency seems to grate on people horribly -- whether or not they realize it.

When Culture is poorly communicated.

The employee is punished for an infraction of a policy that they've never heard of.

When Culture is at odds with the values of an employee.

For instance, a laid-back, fuzzy thinker, artist-at-heart in a very results-oriented, precise, bottom-line sort of organization.

I think culture changes more slowly than policy, but can be changed (often by a set of new policies that are carefully designed and implemented to help nurture the desired culture) -- and like any change, cultural change thrives best in environments where communication is healthy, open, ongoing.

No company can preserve its culture without communication. As people come and go it is imperative that the communication continues, and that people are having a dialog about what they like about their company, what they would like to be different; if they are engaged in this dialog, they are far more likely to remain and make a difference for the company in all the OTHER areas of change that are taking place.

Bea Rigby
Aspen Technical Services, Inc.

There is no possible line of conduct which has not at some time and place been condemned, and which at some other time and place been enjoined as a duty.

William Lecky

TEAMWORK CAN REQUIRE CHANGE

by Lou Schuyler

Many companies are trying to encourage teamwork. Although there are many reasons for this, one is that information technology has increased the amount of integration possible and desired.

Whether a company manufactures products or delivers professional services, the "information" about the product or service used throughout the company must be accurate, reliable and accessible, and timely. That means that in many organizations - marketing, sales, purchasing, production, distribution, customer service, finance and planning, and human resources - are involved in the definition and development of that information.

A company taking on a strategic initiative involving a significant new information system (ERP, CRM, Web sales, Balanced Scorecard, etc), must build a team with recruits from many departments to oversee the planning and implementation. The assumption is that a handful of smart, dedicated people, who speak for all parts of the business, can manage the project and pull it off.

But the going gets pretty rough, pretty fast, if these people are unaccustomed to interacting with peers from other departments. It's even rougher if their managers are unaccustomed to sharing resources and responsibility. Many companies still operate in silos, with individual departments operating very much alone and without regard for the workings of other departments. It is difficult for people to work effectively in teams if the company culture has not encouraged them to share information and work together across departmental lines.

The team may be the first group within the company to experience the culture change that the new information system will eventually introduce. The project is so big and so important they must learn to share information and work together.

The cultural change introduced by the new information system will eliminate the "gatekeeper" status that possession of official information has previously afforded to individuals or departments. In the new culture, information is available to many organizations and those who hoard information will be viewed as working against common goals.

Open and honest communication is key to culture change. People must know what is changing, and why. They must understand the expectations of the new environment, and how they are doing.

In order for the team to achieve its goals, it must have open and honest communication:

- Every member must understand the business objectives, the budget and resource constraints
- The team must develop the project plan jointly and agree on achievable schedules for well-defined deliverables
- Input and active participation must be sought from every member and taken into consideration
- Scope creep (potential significant changes) must be dealt with directly and decisions to make changes must be documented in the plan
- Team members must know what they are responsible for and must be given feedback on their progress
- A process must be in place to help navigate through current organizational roadblocks
- Regular reports must be reviewed with sponsors that clearly identify progress against the agreed upon project plan

The members of the team will carry back their new approaches to their own organizations and will be well positioned to embrace the new culture of sharing information with the successful implementation of the new system.

"Company culture" is a combination of the written and unwritten rules that people follow in their day-to-day activities on the job.

©2002, Lou Schuyler is an independent consultant specializing in information technology project management and can be reached via Lou-Schuyler@worldnet.att.net

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Peter de Jager
de Jager & Company Limited
22 MARCHBANK CRESCENT
BRAMPTON, ONT
L6S 3B1
CANADA
TEL: 1-905-792-8706
FAX: 1-905-792-9818
WWW.TECHNOBILITY.COM

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Change Seminar Opportunity

I will be holding four one day Change workshops, at the following locations and dates.

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Philadelphia, PA	July 19 th 2002
Orlando, FL	July 28 th 2002
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*The fee structure is unique. \$595.00USD for your first attendee.
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Each attendee will also receive a copy of The Change Chronicles Video, a \$75.00 value.

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I'm primarily a speaker/consultant on issues relating to Change and the Future. You can contact me via e-mail at pdejager@technobility.com or call me at 1-905-792-8706 to discuss how I might be of service to your organization.

My primary speaking topics fall under the umbrella of Change, Technology and the Future. Here are some sample titles.

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Basically everything I talk about in this journal are topics I consult and speak about. Let's discuss how I might be of service to you. If I can't help you, I know someone who can.

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That's it... see you next month!
Peter de Jager