



Are You the Enemy of Change?

November 22, 2016

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Whenever a new training initiative launches, change occurs, resulting in various reactions. For some, change can cause fear, doubt anxiety, insecurity, or perhaps ambivalence. While for others, change means excitement, anticipating opportunities, and looking forward to a new future. Depending on your reaction, you may help or hinder the adoption of the change.

Different Change Reactions

There have been various psychological insights about the way we work. However, many of them do not take into account our individual differences. Personalities vary widely and can strongly influence our attitudes, as well as how we react to change. There are four common, yet distinct, behavioral reactions to change are:

- **Drivers of change** – These individuals tend to be direct, demonstrate a results-oriented approach, embrace quick decisions and changes, and are usually the ones that initiate the change by challenging the status quo.
- **Influencers of change** – They are optimistic, enthusiastic and try to keep everyone motivated during times of flux by using their creativity and networks to develop innovative solutions to handling change.
- **Resisters of change and need time to prepare** - They are steady decision makers that do not like to be rushed and may appear to "put-up" with change since it may be difficult to determine how deeply they are impacted by the changes until much later.
- People who are **concerned with the effects of change** – They are the cautious, careful, and objective thinkers who seek to maintain the high standards regardless of the changes going on around them.

Recognizing Resistance

If you have identified yourself as being among those who automatically resist change, do not worry. You have lots of company. Even those who embrace and thrive on change, and those who usually aren't bothered by it, can suffer initial resistance. The key is to train yourself to be more mindful of your

reactions. First, recognize and acknowledge your resistance. Are you simply resisting change because it is your nature to do so, or is there a valid reason?

Gaining Commitment to Change

It is difficult to go along with a change initiative, much less lead it if the goals of the initiative are not in alignment with your fundamentally held beliefs and values. According to BlessingWhite's (2010) article, *The 3 C's of Change*, "when organizational values and individual values are both clear and congruent, individual commitment to the goals of the organization are significantly higher."¹ To reduce resistance, consider five ways a training professional can gain commitment to the change from individuals:

1. **Give people information** - Be as open and honest about the facts as you can without giving overoptimistic speculation. Share the vision and urgency of the change. This will build trust and confidence in the proposed change.

Also inform staff why the change is being made and what the benefits of the change are in a real and tangible way. While departmental, organizational and community benefits are important to express, people tend to be more concerned about how the change will impact their role directly.

2. **Speak to participants directly** - Don't let the rumour mill take over. If possible, tell everyone at the same time. Then follow up with smaller group sessions or individual interviews to identify personal values and select ways to deal with specific reactions to change. You may need to adapt your communication approach to address the needs of the different personalities during the training.
3. **Acknowledge losses** - Where change is involved there is usually a loss. Some people may lose access to a system, autonomy, status or resources. These losses can be severe and impede an individual's ability to perform. It is important to identify what will remain the same and what might replace that loss. It is easier to cope with a loss if there is something to replace it. Demonstrating empathy will also show staff that you care and support them. This will help alleviate potential fears.
4. **Give people time** – Where change is too much and too fast, people feel overwhelmed and experience change fatigue. Wherever it is possible, give individuals an opportunity to express their concerns and share their views. Show support, provide coaching, counselling or information as appropriate, to help staff through the change curve and providing reassurances to help relieve their apprehensions.
5. **Evaluate systems, structures and culture** – People will revert to old habits if there are no consequences to remaining the same. Work with Human Resource and other impacted departments to re-evaluate systems and structures and align the organizational culture to ensure that the desired behavior change will be sustained.

Regardless of the type, magnitude, speed of the change, or the anticipated positive benefits, without having a formal approach to change management that addresses staff reactions with the intent to gain commitment, the change initiative will likely fail. Your role as a learning professional is to share the vision of the change, identify what is changing, what is not, why change is urgent, and why employees should accept it. Equally important is demonstrating that you believe in that change. The sooner you can align your support with the change the easier it will be for you to commit and help others accept it.

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¹ BlessingWhite. The 3 C's of Change (2010). Online: <http://www.blessingwhite.com/content/articles/enews/May2010.asp?pid=2>.