



OVERCOMING ORGANIZATIONAL  
RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

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## INTRODUCTION

Organizations are struggling to cope with the rapidly changing market place. Efforts are made to adapt, innovate, and embrace new ways of doing business.

**But something is not working!**

Our research indicates that over two-thirds of all major change initiatives prove to be disappointments or outright failures (Watson Wyatt, McKinsey).

**Change fails for several reasons.** Sometimes the company's culture simply doesn't tolerate change. People aren't ready for it yet and they resist it. Maybe the change was ill-conceived, poorly thought-out, or even unnecessary. Perhaps adequate or appropriate resources weren't available, or the timing just wasn't right. But one of the biggest obstacles to change is the behavior of leaders. Not only can leaders fail to manage change effectively, but their behaviors can make things even worse, resulting in a situation where it would have been better to do nothing!

## WHY RESISTANCE TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE?

Most employees don't like change because they don't like being changed. When change comes into view, fear and resistance to change follow – often despite its obvious benefits.

Employees fight against change because they:

- ▶ Fear to lose something they value
- ▶ Don't understand the change and its implications
- ▶ Don't think that the change makes sense
- ▶ Find it difficult to cope with either the level or pace of the change

Resistance emerges when there is a threat to something the employee values. The threat may be real or it may be just a perception. It may arise from a genuine understanding of the change or misunderstanding, or even almost total ignorance about it.



# HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY OVERCOME ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE RESISTANCE

*“Change your thoughts and you change your world”*

*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

## 1. Change vision and strategy

A change vision articulates a picture of the future, and why employees should strive to create it. The vision must be compelling enough to generate the excitement needed to propel employees through the chaos of change. A change vision provides orientation and meaning for leaders and their teams and can serve as a strong driving force towards shared goals.

*“Successful change is hinged on a picture of a desirable future. Vision can provide both a corporate sense of being and a sense of enduring purpose. Without a sensible vision, change efforts can dissolve into a list of confusing projects that take the organization in the wrong direction. It is important that the vision be easy to communicate”*

*John P. Kotter*

A change vision is little more than an empty dream until it is widely shared and accepted. Care should be taken to ensure that a change vision and corresponding core values are realistic and achievable. Otherwise, the vision might remain an unattainable illusion, and the individuals who are supposed to turn it into reality may become frustrated and demotivated. The change vision must have leadership alignment.

Change vision and strategy are both important. But, there is a priority to them. Change vision always comes first! If you have a clear vision, you will eventually formulate the right strategy.

**If you don't have a clear change vision, no formulated strategy will help you!**



## 2. Cascading leadership and emulation of right behavior

The effectiveness of the change sponsor and the formal structures – such as a governance body and their cascading influence across all levels of the organization plays a significant role in the success of an organizational change.

The behavior of the change sponsor and the behavior of all management must match the words. As the old cliché goes, “actions speak louder than words!” Senior leaders play a huge role in teaching their reporting staff expected and desired behavior. Senior leaders must visibly walk the talk.

**Learning new skills and improving existing skills must be encouraged.**

## 3. Formal structures

The formal structure of an organization provides two important roles for organizational members. The structure of an organization clarifies roles for organizational members so that each member knows what they are supposed to do, and who they report to. The structure also dictates the amount of control an organizational member has regarding their job in the organization.

**The formal structures must support the behaviors you are looking to develop and extinguish the behaviors that no longer serve your organization.**

## 4. Commitment

*“There’s a difference between interest and commitment. When you’re interested in doing something, you do it only when circumstances permit. When you’re committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results.”*

*Author Unknown*

Employees must understand and really want to make the change. **Typically, all resistance is about emotion.** To win employees’ commitment to change, they must be engaged on an emotional level and rational level. While connecting with the employee’s emotional side, it is important not to overload them too much emotionally.

