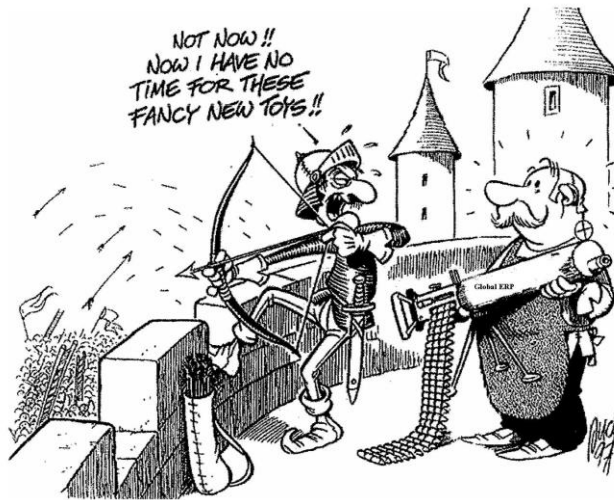# Leading Change

(...) change requires people to perform or perceive in unfamiliar ways, which involves risks. (...) Understandably, people are uncomfortable with risk and tend to avoid it when they can. (...) when they cannot, however (...) adaptation to change tends to proceed through predictable psychological stages. (...) 1. Shock (...) 2. defensive retreat (...) 3.acknowledgement (...) 4. acceptance and adoption.

– Managing Change and Transition (HBS)

People won´t buy into the pain and effort of change unless they can see a future state that is tangibly better – and better for them – then the one they have at the moment.

– Managing Change and Transition (HBS)

Everyone looks at change in a different way. Views of change can be skewed particularly by whether or not the change is one that was planned by the individual. The images of change that people develop often predispose them in their behavior. If change seems like a threat, then people will tend to respond as if it is a real threat. On the other hand, if change looks like a natural process of growth and development, people approach change accordingly.

Responsiveness to change is also dependent on past experiences with change. If a person's past has been filled with turbulent changes that were not chosen by him or her, then that person's approach to change will probably focus more on the concerns of security and stability.

The difficulty in mastering change lies in the fact that we can't "program" ourselves to adjust. Human beings are complex and emotional, and some of the stress of change comes from a gap between what we want to feel and do, and what we actually feel. The gap will not go away by ignoring it, but it can be easier to take by recognizing and facing up to one's real difficulty with change.

workday

Do not be surprised by resistance! Even if the solution a project presents is a wonderful improvement to a problem that has been plaguing employees, there will still be resistance to change. Comfort with the status quo is extraordinarily powerful. Fear of moving into an unknown future state creates anxiety and stress, even if the current state is painful.

Top Reasons for Employee Resistance
1. Lack of Awareness of Why a Change is Needed
2. Change Specific Resistance
3. Change Saturation
4. Fear
5. Lack of Support From Management or Leadership

Top Reasons for Manager Resistance
1. Organizational Culture
2. Lack of Awareness and Knowledge About the Change
3. Lack of Buy-in
4. Misalignment of Project Goals and Personal Incentives
5. Lack of Confidence in Their Own Ability to Manage the People Side of Change

Resistance Does Not Occur in a Vacuum!

It could occur for PERSONAL reasons…
✓ Employee's personal and family situation
✓ Employee's professional career history and plans
✓ Degree that this change affects them personally

It could occur for ORGANIZATIONAL reasons…
✓ History with change (success/failure)
✓ Organization's values and culture
✓ Change saturation and capacity

Managing resistance is ineffective when it simply focuses on the symptoms. The symptoms of resistance are observable and often overt, such as complaining, not attending key meetings, not providing requested information or resources, or simply not adopting a change to process or behavior. While they

workday

are more evident, focusing on these symptoms will not yield results. To be effective at managing resistance, you must look deeper into what is ultimately causing the resistance. Effective resistance management requires identification of the root causes of resistance—understanding why someone is resistant, not simply how that resistance is manifesting itself.

From most effective to least effective

1. Listen and understand objections
2. Focus on the "what" and let go of the "how"
3. Remove barriers
4. Provide simple, clear choices and consequences
5. Create hope
6. Show the benefits in a tangible way
7. Make a personal appeal
8. Convert the strongest dissenters

Resistance is ultimately an individual phenomenon. While research and analysis can identify broadly the root causes for resistance, it is important to ultimately address resistance by individuals at the individual level. The best way to identify the root cause of resistance is through a **personal conversation** between a resistant employee and his/her manager.

The "right" **resistance managers** in an organization are the **senior leaders**, **middle managers,** and **frontline supervisors**. Project team members, Change Management team, Human Resources, or Organization Development specialists are not effective resistance managers. It takes action by leadership in an organization to manage resistance. If managers are not committed to a change or waver in their support, employees will judge the change as unimportant and resist the change. However, if they are openly supportive of and advocating for a particular change, these behaviors will also show up in how employees react to the change.

You can see that from your perspective, creating a culture of change for you and WPI is imperative! Increasing your knowledge and confidence on the competency of change, increases our success and creates buy-in to support the rest of the institute.

Also see the 8 Steps for Leading Change handout.

Enterprise Transformation Program
Change Management Team
workday@wpi.edu