

ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR, MB 201, MBA –II Semester,
Topic: Resistance to Change & its Sources

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Resistance to Change

As the manager contemplates and initiates change in the organization, one phenomenon that is quite likely to emerge anytime in the change process is the resistance to change. People often resist change in a rational response based on self-interest. Resistance to change doesn't necessarily surface in standardized ways. Resistance can be overt, implicit, immediate, or deferred. It is easiest for management to deal with resistance when it is overt and immediate. The greater challenge is managing resistance that is implicit or deferred.

The sources of resistance to change can be categorized into two sources individual and organizational:

- a) Individual Resistance:** One aspect of mankind that has remained more or less constant is his innate resistance to change. Individuals resist change because they attach great preference to maintaining the status quo. Individual sources of resistance to change reside in basic human characteristics such as perceptions, personalities and needs. The following are the reasons

(a) **Economic Reasons:** The economic reasons to fear change usually focus on one or more of the following:

- Fear of technological unemployment
- Fear of reduced work hours and consequently less pay
- Fear of demotion and thus reduced wages
- Fear of speed-up and reduced incentive wages.

Changes in job tasks or established work routines can also arouse economic fears if people are concerned they won't be able to perform the new tasks or routines to the previous standards especially when pay is closely tied to productivity.

(b) **Fear of the unknown:** Change often brings with it substantial uncertainty. Employees facing a technological change, such as the introduction of a new computer system may resist the change simply because it introduces ambiguity into what was once a comfortable situation for them. This is especially a problem when there has been a lack of communication about the change.

(c) **Fear of Loss:** When a change is impending, some employees may fear losing their jobs particularly when an advanced technology is introduced. Employees may also fear losing their status because of a change. Another common fear is that changes may diminish the positive qualities the individual enjoys in the job. For example, computerizing the customer service positions threaten the autonomy that sales representatives previously enjoyed.

(d) **Security:** People with a high need for security are likely to resist change because it threatens their feeling of safety.

(e) **Status quo:** Perhaps the biggest and most sound reason for the resistance to change is the status quo. As human beings, we are creatures of habit. Change may pose disturbance to the existing comforts of status quo.

When confronted with change this tendency to respond in our accustomed ways becomes a source of resistance Change means they will have to find new ways of managing them and their environment the ways that might not be successful as those currently used.

- (f) **Peer Pressure:** Individual employees may be prepared to accept change but refuse to accept it for the sake of the group Whenever change is unwilling to the peers, they force the individuals who want to accept change to resist change.
- (g) **Disruption of Interpersonal Relationships:** Employees may resist change that threatens to limit meaningful interpersonal relationships on the job.
- (h) **Social Displacement:** Introduction of change often results in disturbance of the existing social relationships. Change may also result in breaking up of work groups Thus when social relationships develop, people try to maintain them and fight social displacement by resisting change.

b) Organizational Resistance: Organizations, by their very nature are conservative. They actively resist change. Some of the organizational resistances are explained below:

- (a) **Resource Constraints:** Resources are major constraints for many organizations. The necessary financial material and human resources may not be available to the organization to make the needed changes Further, those groups in organization that control sizable resources often see change as a threat. They tend to be content with the way things are.
- (b) **Structural Inertia:** Some organizational structures have in-built mechanism for resistance to change. For example, in

a bureaucratic structure where jobs are narrowly defined and lines of authority are clearly spelled out, change would be difficult. This is so because formalization provides job descriptions, rules, and procedures for employees to follow. The people who are hired into an organization are chosen for fit, they are then shaped and directed to behave in certain ways. When an organization is confronted with change, this structural inertia acts as a counterbalance to sustain stability.

- (c) **Sunk Costs:** Some organizations invest a huge amount of capital in fixed assets. If an organization wishes to introduce change, then difficulty arises because of these sunk costs.
- (d) **Politics:** Organizational change may also shift the existing balance of power in an organization. Individuals or groups who hold power under the current arrangement may be threatened with losing these political advantages in the advent of change.
- (e) **Threat to established power relationships:** Any redistribution of decision-making authority can threaten long established power relationships within the organization. Managers may therefore resist change that introduces participative decision making because they feel threatened.
- (f) **Threat to expertise:** Change in organizational pattern may threaten the expertise of specialized groups. Therefore, specialists usually resist change.
- (g) **Group Inertia:** Even if individuals want to change their behaviour, group norms may act as a constraint. For example, if union norms dictate resistance to any unilateral change made by management, an individual member of the union who may otherwise be willing to accept the changes may resist it.

Managing Resistance to Change

Although resistance to change is a common phenomenon in organizations, it must be noted that not all changes are resisted. In fact, if we look at any organization closely we would probably find that far more changes are accepted than resisted. The traditional view of resistance to change treated it as something to be overcome, and many organizational attempts to reduce the resistance have only served to intensify it. The contemporary view holds that resistance is simply a form of feedback and that this feedback can be used very productively to manage the change process. One key to managing resistance is to plan for it and to be ready with a variety of strategies for using the resistance as feedback and helping employees negotiate the transition. Some tactics have been suggested for use in dealing with resistance to change.

- a. **Education and Communication:** Communication about impending change is essential for employees to adjust effectively. The details of the change should be provided, but equally important is the rationale behind the change. Employees want to know why change is needed. If there is no good reason for it, why should they favour the change? Providing accurate and timely information about the change can help prevent unfounded fears and potentially damaging rumours from developing. It is also beneficial to inform people about the potential consequences of the change. Educating employees on new work procedures is often helpful.
- b. **Participation:** it is difficult for individuals to resist a change decision in which they participated. Prior to making a change, those opposed can be brought into the decision process.

When employees are allowed to participate, they are more committed to the change.

- c. **Empathy and Support:** Another strategy for managing resistance is providing empathy and support to employees who have trouble dealing with the change. Active listening is an excellent tool for identifying the reasons behind resistance and for uncovering fears. An expression of concern about the change can provide important feedback that managers can use to improve the change process.
- d. **Negotiation:** Another way to deal with potential resistance to change is to exchange something of value for a lessening of the resistance. Where some persons in a group clearly lose out in a change, and where groups have considerable power to resist, negotiation and agreements are helpful. It becomes relatively easy to avoid major resistance through negotiation. Negotiation as a tactic may be necessary when resistance comes from a powerful source.
- e. **Manipulation and Cooptation:** Manipulation refers to covert influence attempts. Twisting and distorting facts to make them appear more attractive, withholding undesirable information and creating false rumours to get employees to accept a change are all examples of manipulation. It involves giving individuals a desirable role in design or implementation of change.
- f. **Coercion:** Coercion is the application of direct threats or force on the resisters. They essentially force people to accept a change by explicitly or implicitly threatening them with the loss of their jobs, promotion possibilities and transferring them. Coercion is mostly applied where speed is essential in

implementing change and the change initiator possesses considerable power.