

A QUIZ TO SEE HOW YOU WILL MANAGE CHANGE



Summary: Take this short quiz to see how you will manage change. Use it to find out what you need to work on and learn how to avoid resistance to change.

Any person who's managed change will tell you that the proposed change itself isn't the hard part. The real difficulty is managing the resistance to change.

Employees and other managers have a host of reasons for not wanting change, many of them subconscious. Anxiety is a key factor. They don't know if they'll be better off after a change, but they're familiar with the current method and its payoffs.

Previous priorities, resources and agendas also come into play, along with self-interest and internal politics. Even if employees are told to do something, they often regard the requests as nuisances or impositions and resist them.

Technical Versus Human

Change has two aspects: a technical content and a human, organizational side. Managers who aren't effective at shaping change concentrate on the technical aspects and ignore the human side, which involves understanding organizational lines and dealing with internal politics. They resent having to address such issues or are intimidated by the thought of resistance.

Yet if the people involved aren't ready to change, the technical adjustments won't be made and the program will fail. This is true when companies reorganize, introduce new products or services, simplify work procedures or alter pay systems. In most cases where change is successful, months of groundwork are required for employee buy-ins before the actual implementation.

Because of the difficulty involved, managers who can get others to accept the unfamiliar and do things differently are viewed as truly earning their pay. In fact, during periods of reorganizations and layoffs, having this skill is so critical that it provides a measure of job security.

If you want to improve your ability to manage change, take the accompanying quiz to measure how well you can sell others on your ideas and overcome resistance to change. Give yourself a point for each correct answer. After determining your score, review the answers for a better understanding of the change process.

Resistance to Change Self-Test

To the following 12 statements, answer "true" if you think it's mostly true, and "false" if you think it's mostly false. Each correct answer receives one point; tally up your score at the end.

1. You should try to sell an idea to the natural leaders in the organization before selling it to others. (Answer)
2. Explaining thoroughly the reasons for a change invariably will turn resistance into cooperation. (Answer)
3. Getting to know subordinates well is one of the best ways to overcome their resistance to change. (Answer)
4. It's usually better to address a group about a change that will affect them, rather than talk to each person individually. (Answer)
5. Managers should be constantly looking for changes that would improve the efficiency of their departments. (Answer)
6. Managers should feel free to suggest changes to peers in other departments. (Answer)
7. Irrelevant issues will often defeat a good proposal for change. (Answer)
8. A manager should inform his or her subordinates as far in advance as possible about changes that will affect them. (Answer)
9. If there's a difference of opinion about a proposed change, a logical argument ought to be sufficient to resolve the difference. (Answer)
10. When I propose a program or an idea, I'm unlikely to encounter resistance except on the most important issues. (Answer)
11. Suggestion systems provide good ideas for changes because the ideas are processed by a neutral party, instead of people who have a stake in their implementation or rejection. (Answer)
12. People will readily accept changes recommended by experts or consultants. (Answer)

Analyzing the Answers

1. You should try to sell an idea to the natural leaders in the organization before selling it to others. True. It's always best to sell ideas to the natural leaders in the organization before trying to convince others. Natural or informal leaders have considerable clout, which can be used to your advantage. They can tell you how others will receive your ideas, possible reasons for resistance and ways to overcome objections.

Once they're sold on your proposition, they can neutralize others' resistance. In fact, obtaining the endorsement of one street-smart, well-liked informal leader can sometimes be more useful than having the formal endorsement of a distant senior executive. (Back to the test)

2. Explaining thoroughly the reasons for a change invariably will turn resistance into cooperation. False. Explaining thoroughly the reasons for a change won't always turn resistance into cooperation. Resistance to change is seldom abated by merely explaining why change is needed. To accomplish that, those affected must be assured that they won't lose any benefits. This means determining their current payoffs and how they'll be affected.

Even positive changes, such as upgrading jobs, are often resisted. Not everyone wants more responsibility, and what challenges one person can threaten another. In such cases, the effects must be explained in detail to everyone involved. To argue that a change is good for the company or will cause greater efficiency isn't likely to be successful. Only personally relevant concerns should be addressed. (Back to the test)

3. Getting to know subordinates well is one of the best ways to overcome their resistance to change. True. Getting to know subordinates is one of the best ways to overcome resistance. Listen to and observe others for insights into their preferences, goals and typical behavior. Are they passive or aggressive, closed-minded or flexible? Are they protective of their turfs? Do they stand up for others? These and other observations can help you determine what they want, how to motivate them and which aspects of your idea they're likely to resist. (Back to the test)
4. It's usually better to address a group about a change that will affect them, rather than talk to each person individually. False. It's always better to talk individually to affected persons about a change than to address them as a group. Managers have less control when presenting ideas to a group. One consistently negative person can sour an entire meeting, causing others to clam up because they aren't sure of themselves or fear confrontation. Employees who don't feel strongly either way also may be influenced by the negative colleague.

Talking with people individually gives you a chance to address objections and sell your point of view without interruptions. Schedule a group meeting later for everyone to publicly bear witness to their support. (Back to the test)

5. Managers should be constantly looking for changes that would improve the efficiency of their departments. False. Managers shouldn't always be looking for ways to improve their departments' efficiency. Even though change has become a sacred cow, change for change's sake doesn't always improve operations. In fact, many managers pursue new changes simply because previous alterations were poorly implemented.

After any change, give people involved time to learn and perform their new responsibilities and procedures. Too often, other changes are imposed if the first one doesn't go smoothly. This frequently results in unneeded complexity and further delays. (Back to the test)

6. Managers should feel free to suggest changes to peers in other departments. False. Managers shouldn't freely suggest changes in other departments. Telling other managers they should do things differently implies that you disapprove of how they run their departments. Even if your intentions are good, it's unlikely that your observations will be well received. The implied criticism invariably will make them feel embarrassed and defensive.

The best way to make suggestions to other managers is to mention areas that could be improved. One technique is asking questions pertaining to the suggestion you'd like to make, such as, "I was reading about the new Japanese technique to improve productivity. They've had some pretty spectacular results with it. How do you think such methods could be implemented here?" Asking this question can prompt a discussion about the technique and ways colleagues could use it to improve operations. (Back to the test)

7. Irrelevant issues will often defeat a good proposal for change. True. Many good ideas are shot down for reasons that have nothing to do with their merit. With most new ideas and the resulting changes, the decisive factor is the attitude of the people involved. Thus, when seeking approval of an idea, outpsyching the opposition is more effective than marshalling arguments in favor of it. (Back to the test)

8. A manager should inform his or her subordinates as far in advance as possible about changes that will affect them. False. Managers shouldn't inform subordinates far in advance about changes that will affect them unless the discussion addresses their fears and needs. Giving others advance information may also provide the ammunition they need to thwart the change. (Back to the test)

9. If there's a difference of opinion about a proposed change, a logical argument ought to be sufficient to resolve the difference. False. Logical arguments rarely are helpful in resolving objections about a proposed change. Some managers believe that plainly reciting the facts will persuade opponents to endorse their views. In many cases, though, the statements are viewed as arguments against an opponent's position and produce a counterattack. Military history shows that indirect attacks are the most successful way to defeat the opposition. Thus, when introducing a change, it's best to persuade and sell the benefits indirectly. (Back to the test)

10. When I propose a program or an idea, I'm unlikely to encounter resistance except on the most important issues. False. You're more likely to encounter resistance in unexpected areas. Different people have different views of what's important. Even minor issues can draw such varying responses as enthusiasm, indifference or outright rejection. Know what the change and its payoff means to different people before trying to gain acceptance. (Back to the test)

11. Suggestion systems provide good ideas for changes because the ideas are processed by a neutral party, instead of people who have a stake in their implementation or rejection. False. If the manager responsible for implementing a change doesn't participate in its development, it's likely to get a lukewarm reception at best. The most workable suggestions are created by groups that neutralize worries about how managers will react to employee ideas.

Some middle managers worry about how superiors will receive an idea, and don't like taking risks that put them on the spot. As a rule, getting a very senior manager to endorse a proposal will ensure success. (Back to the test)

12. People will readily accept changes recommended by experts or consultants. False. Employees often reject changes recommended by outside experts. Consultants are outsiders who must prove themselves to employees before their ideas will be accepted. Even if an expert is part of the group, he's still voicing an opinion, which must mesh with the needs of the group. (Back to the test)

Scoring and Interpretation

If you scored in the nine- to 12-point range, you're adept at selling programs and neutralizing the resistance of peers, superiors and subordinates. You know how to convert resistance or opposition into cooperation.

A score of four to eight points shows that you're sometimes successful in using diplomacy, persuasiveness and indirect maneuvers to achieve consensus and overcome resistance. However, you need to improve your strategies for overcoming resistance because you often rely on less-effective methods to gain cooperation, such as technical logic, good intentions or your status.

A score of three points or less indicates that you fail to recognize resistance and cope with it effectively. As a result, your change efforts often become muddled. To successfully execute your programs, you'll need to develop greater sensitivity to others.

How to Improve Your Score

When seeking acceptance for an idea, an indirect approach is often better than a direct or confrontational strategy that can generate struggles, competition and other forms of resistance. Some managers enjoy one-upmanship and overt competition, but it's seldom effective in persuading people. Resistance often goes underground, which can weaken the idea in the long run.

On the other hand, indirect methods of persuasion allow the people involved to reach the desired conclusions on their own. If it seems like their idea, they're more likely to endorse it. Since resistance isn't driven underground, the chances for neutralizing it are enhanced.

When seeking endorsements, talk with peers and decision-makers individually about what they want, not what you want. Try to meet as many affected people as possible. Gauge their reactions and let them know that you're interested in their needs, wants and personal agendas. Match your arguments to their interests and use questions to draw out concerns.

Hold group meetings later for image-building and general communications. Develop short headline phrases or sentences that capture the essence of your program and use them frequently to reinforce the theme and keep others focused on the big picture. Choose simple, plain language over confusing technical jargon. However, if your audience views your program positively, don't worry if you're not crystal clear about all the details.

Identify needs and concerns of all affected employees and try to package the presentation so that it addresses many of them. Use every vehicle of communication possible to gain favorable attention and publicity for you and the program.

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