



RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Objectives

1. To examine fundamental reasons why people and organizations resist change.
2. To gain an appreciation that the adoption of innovation is a complex process involving a variety of people and factors.

Outline

[The nature of change](#)

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[Factors affecting the adoption of change.](#)

- [Characteristics of Innovations that Foster Adoption](#)
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THE NATURE OF CHANGE

Adoption of Change

The adoption of new ideas and techniques does not occur naturally but results from hard work, trial and error. It is important to recognize this fact and to make an effort to develop information that is concise, readable and to the point and to make sure the information reaches people who can use it. A broad spectrum of skills is needed to lead to effective management of innovation and change. There is no magic formula for success--no such formulas exist.

Multiple channels of communication should be used to promote the adoption of an innovation. Never expect one report, one presentation, one telephone call or one conference to accomplish everything. Successful programs need to be carefully conceived and carried out. Human contacts are critical ingredients, and need to be used along with good written and visual materials. These materials are useless without an understanding of the needs, limitations and problems of the user.

Change agents can bring innovation for the user by examining their preconceived notions about the way things should be done. Personnel have to be receptive to change themselves, they have to be able to evaluate new ideas objectively and see their users --not as they have been --but as they might be.

Resistance to Change

The adoption of innovations involves altering human behavior, and the acceptance of change. There is a natural resistance to change for several reasons.

People resist change:

- When the reason for the change is unclear. Ambiguity--whether it is about costs, equipment, jobs--can trigger negative reactions among users.
- When the proposed users have not been consulted about the change, and it is offered to them as an accomplished fact. People like to know what's going on, especially if their jobs may be affected. Informed workers tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction than uninformed workers.
- When the change threatens to modify established patterns of working relationships between people.
- When communication about the change--timetables, personnel, monies, etc.--has not been sufficient.
- When the benefits and rewards for making the change are not seen as adequate for the trouble involved.
- When the change threatens jobs, power or status in an organization.

(An unwilling user can always make an idea fail, no matter how good it is.)

Decision makers will be more responsive to change:

- If the information presented coincides with their current values, beliefs, and attitudes:
- If they perceive that the change will benefit them more than it will cost them:
- If the innovation requires marginal rather than major changes in their views or lives:
- If they have a demonstrated need for the innovation: and
- If the innovation is introduced gradually so that people can adjust to the resulting change.

FACTORS WHICH AFFECT THE ADOPTION OF INNOVATION

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INNOVATION

Relative Advantage:

Generally, innovations must be seen as producing a **SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT** over current procedures and techniques in order to be adopted. The benefits must be perceived as so great as to be well worth the inevitable problems and costs associated with any change.

Simplicity:

The innovation, or at least the way it is presented, should be **EASY TO UNDERSTAND**. Even when users agree that the proposed change would be "good," they may not be enthusiastic if they think it's too complicated to understand or implement.

Easy to Try:

The new method or item must be easy to introduce, as well as easy to abandon if it doesn't seem to be working out. If an agency must make drastic changes in operating procedures in order to try something out, it will resist change, whatever its perceived merits. It helps if a technology can be tried in stages before the final decision to adopt is made.

Easy to Measure:

Once the new procedure or item is in place, it must be easy to measure the benefits, whether in money, time, efficiency or some other evaluation measure meaningful to the adopter.

Inexpensive:

The up-front cost of a new technology is often an obstacle, especially in rural areas and small agencies. If there is a large immediate increase in costs, it will be difficult to get the technology adopted, even if long-term savings are guaranteed.

Characteristics of the Organization**Risk Taking Climate:**

Are the managers of the organization willing to take risks? Both the size and age of an organization can affect this willingness. Younger firms are usually more willing to take risks and, for risk taking, small is better. The complicated structure of larger firms works against risk taking. The exception to this are large organizations whose success has been based on innovation.

Attitude towards Failure:

New ideas, procedures and technology involve risk and it is not possible to always succeed. Good decisions can have bad outcomes. How an organization reacts to a failed attempt to implement a change is critical. If people are punished, belittled, or put down for trying something new that doesn't work, they will be seldom willing to do it again. If, on the other hand, efforts are made to learn from the failure and to make it work a more open process of change will occur.

Compatible Procedures/Technology:

The more a new idea is compatible with past procedures, techniques and values of an organization, the more likely the organization is to adopt it.

Extent of Regulation:

The extent to which outside organizations, particularly government, can control the behavior of an organization affects innovation. Such outside regulation can have either a positive or negative effect, depending on the regulation and/or its enforcement.

Labor Reaction:

The likely reaction of employee groups will also affect whether or not a new idea is tried. Any change likely to cause a loss of rights or job security will need to have significant benefits for an organization to be willing to risk trying it out.

CHANGE WORKSHEET

A way to understand resistance to change is to use the following worksheet. This should be filled out separately by people in an organization, then discussed. What are the consensus reasons why people in your organization resist change???

The following factors affect how an individual or an organization reacts to change. Pick the five you think are most important. When you have chosen the top five, then rank these on a scale of 1 (most important) to 5. Think of examples to back up your opinions.

Personal Factors:

- _____ Age
 - _____ Sex
 - _____ Education
 - _____ Marital status
 - _____ Experience
 - _____ Time in the same job
 - _____ Occupation
 - _____ Other (Explain) _____
-

Job Related Factors:

- _____ Number of Subordinates
 - _____ Breadth of Activity
 - _____ Degree of Autonomy
 - _____ Amount of Job Security
 - _____ Availability of Slack Time
 - _____ Prestige of Position
 - _____ Variety of Work
 - _____ Other (Explain) _____
-

Organizational Factors:

- _____ Size
- _____ Structure (Degree of Centralization)

- _____ Autonomy from Outside Political Pressure
 - _____ Funding/Budget
 - _____ Recognition
 - _____ Reward System
 - _____ Age of the Organization
 - _____ Prestige
 - _____ Other (Explain) _____
-

1. _____ (Most Important)
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

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