

Dealing With Employee Pushback In Change Management



Any time you make an organizational change, even if for the better, in the long run, you run the risk of employee pushback. Handling that resistance is one of the most difficult parts of making change.

Whether it's something small like changing a business workflow or process or something much bigger like completely restructuring a department, you'll likely run into a few employees who are resistant to the change - and as a result, may find yourself dealing with some bad behavior from employees.

For the best results, part of your change management plan should include strategies for combating resistance from team members.

Before we dive into *how* to deal with these changes, let's first spend some time looking at the reasons employees resist change in the first place. By truly understanding the cause, you can better develop management strategies to deal with the change process.

No matter the reason for the change, or what the change itself is, employees most commonly resist it because of:

- Low tolerance and fear

- Poor communication
- Lack of trust
- Self-interest

Low Tolerance and Fear

Lots of people don't like change because they're scared of it. They fear they won't have enough time to develop the skills they need, which causes them to feel insecure.

If they don't have time to adapt to the changes, they may also fear appearing incompetent to their fellow coworkers. Some changes could also lead to losing some relationships and establishing others, pushing people out of their comfort zones.

Poor Communication

The way things are communicated can make all the difference in how it goes over with the team. If a change isn't completely communicated to everyone or is only shared with a certain number of people, those who were out of the loop or are otherwise affected are more likely to resist.

Managers must be able to describe the step-by-step process of what needs to be done exactly, how the changes will be implemented, and how the changes will make things better. If they cannot, they can expect resistance.

Lack of Trust

If there are already trust issues between the managers and employees, the employees are likely to push back whenever the managers introduce change. That's why it's crucial for managers to work on building trust with their team members ahead of any changes.

If the staff doesn't trust their managers, there's much greater potential for misunderstandings, which make employee buy-in hard.

Self-Interest

Some may see changes as a threat to any power they perceive having - whether it

means they won't have any decision-making power or influence over the team. Others may see this change as a sign that additional ones are coming - which they may see as threats.

If the change makes people feel like their jobs are at risk, they are most likely to resist that change.

Resistance to change is natural. Employees may fear losing their jobs. Even if they know their jobs are safe, they may not trust the change will be as worth it as everyone thinks it will be.

Use employee performance reviews as a chance to get feedback on current processes and procedures. This can help you guide further change management.

6 Strategies for Dealing with Employee Pushback

Because of the pandemic, lots of businesses had to go to full-time remote work. That change wasn't necessarily welcome at first, because it is hard to work from home with children who are also home from school.

Luckily, with time, even difficult employees have been able to adjust.

Depending on the nature and extent of the change, you may need to use more than one strategy to ensure the change moves as smoothly as possible. These include:

Communication and Education

Communicate with everyone, and educate them. Don't just explain what the change is, but why the change is necessary, and what the ultimate end goal is.

The more communication that takes place, the better. The rumors can get wild and crazy, fast. The more transparent you are, the less likely you'll have to deal with misinformation.

If you don't have any other significant sources of resistance, this strategy may be

enough. But if you have a lot - you'll need more than this to make real headway.

Participation

Make people part of the process. If your staff feels like they are part of everything, they feel some control over things, and that their input matters. If they don't feel like they have any kind of control over it, they'll resist the change.

Talk with your strategist and human resources department to determine ways that you can involve people in the change and give feedback. The more invested people are, the better.

Support

The transition will have some bumps - but support makes it easier and better for everyone. Talk to your team and find out what their concerns are. Offer additional training and support throughout the change and beyond.

Negotiation

Sometimes, there will be people who won't adapt. Maybe those people have a vested interest in the way things have been, or the change removes them from a position of power.

Planning for negotiation is crucial because it can be expensive, but it will be helpful when there are major changes to the organizational chart.

Manipulation

This strategy is definitely not right for everyone in the business world. Using this tactic, you're asking an influential person or group of people to take a leading role in the initiative solely to influence the others who follow them.

The leading role is symbolic only since the real people in charge don't have any interest in what the person has to say - they're only using them to manipulate the others.

As a result, you should only use this strategy when you need to make transformation happen fast and without spending a lot of money - when you know

other methods won't work.

Coercion

In the most extreme situations, it's not always practical to deal with a lot of back and forth communication and education efforts. This strategy means the change management team forces employees to accept the changes.

Those who refuse to comply or adapt will be terminated. In cases where you expect employees to push back a lot, but you have to change fast, this could be the only way.

Which Strategy is Best?

The answer depends on your individual organization and the changes you're trying to make. You'll need to choose a strategy based on the source of resistance in your organization. You may need to use a combination of multiple strategies to address everything within your company.

After you audit your existing structure, plan your strategy around what your needs are. If you do this well, you can move forward with the changes as you need to, with minimal disruption to productivity and organizational output.

Regardless of the strategies you deploy, change at the organizational level will likely produce some aversion or anxiety in your team members. By looking at your company's organizational needs and anticipating the sources of resistance, you'll be better equipped for dealing with what happens. No matter how you do it, make sure you follow these best practices:

- **Be transparent:** Be as transparent as possible throughout the entire process, so that your employees can maintain (or repair) trust.
- **Address social issues:** Changes are often perceived as threats. People may be concerned about reporting to a new boss. Let people voice their concerns and offer reassurance to relieve anxiety.
- **Communicate the logic behind the change:** Make sure everyone understands why the change is necessary, and why it's happening now. If people think it's "just progress because we need to make progress" they are more likely to resist.

- **Consider employee skill gaps:** Some people may not have the knowledge and skills they need to adjust to the changes. This is especially the case when it comes to new technology. Instead of considering that an aversion, think of that as concern about their ability to perform their jobs.
- **Have a plan ready for those who will be negatively affected:** If the changes mean people's positions have been eliminated or moved around, offer a transition plan.
- **Give your staff the chance to participate:** To ease anxiety and confusion, give people the chance to share their feedback with the process, or provide feedback on the new processes or changes.
- **Be ready to handle conflict:** Collaboration can help make change more manageable. Spend time working on team-building exercises, and focus on mediation procedures. Employee conflicts may come out of the woodwork. Managers need to use emotional intelligence skills to help address the issues.

Final Thoughts

Change is frightening for many of us – even when it's minor.

To ensure you can effectively change your organization with as little disruption as possible, consider the primary reasons for resistance, develop a strategy to mitigate them, and be ready to assist with the transition.

Using these best practices can go a long way toward developing a smooth transition.

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