Change — implications and solutions

Life requires change, every single day, if you as a leader are not facing resistance, then quite likely you are not pushing their teams enough.

BUT the big minds say, we shouldn't fight resistance but rather understand it. Resistance is a signal, its merely your people interpreting change. Take it as vital feedback that enables you as a leader to adjust your approach in order get more "bang for your buck".

People resist change because of the loss associated with it. The pain of losing is far more intense than the pleasure of gaining. As Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman explains in his prospect theory, "Losses loom larger than gains."

Complaining about people resisting change or labeling them as detractors only makes things worse.

In my work leading change in large organizations and fast-growth startups, I've gained a deeper understanding of the losses associated with change. By addressing and empathizing with resistance early on, we can guarantee a positive and productive outcome.

Culture transformation often results in five types of losses:

1. Loss Of Certainty
Most teams resist change because they cannot anticipate the outcome.

We are hardwired to avoid uncertainty at all costs. Research shows that uncertainty is more stressful than predictable negative outcomes. We would rather hear bad news immediately than wait for an uncertain outcome—even if there's a 50%

chance it could be positive.

David McRaney, author of You Are Not So Smart, argues that our brains are naturally inclined to resolve unknowns. "When the brain is facing uncertainty, it creates certainty," he wrote.

Overcoming uncertainty requires clarity and transparency. Leaders can create certainty by providing a clear process with simple steps, defined responsibilities and set timetables. They should prioritize progress over perfection, emphasize gains and celebrate quick wins.

2. Loss Of Control
Change initiatives often fail because they feel imposed rather than like a choice.

As Patrick Lencioni said, it's not that people don't want to change; they don't want to be changed by others.

Research suggests that people want more power, but not for the reasons you suspect. People associate power with autonomy. They don't want more power so they can control others but rather to be in control (of their own actions).

Overcoming the loss of control requires increasing a sense of ownership. Leaders should give people choices rather than presenting change as "my way or the highway." The sooner they involve employees in designing the journey, the more people will feel in control.

3. Loss Of Narrative
People don't want to just do a job—they aspire to be part of something bigger than themselves. When people's values and purposes align with those of an organization, they're more likely to enjoy working there. According to Quantum Workplace, "66% of employees say their culture positively impacts their work and behavior every day."

Unfortunately, leaders often struggle to connect the change

story with the organization's "why." This explains, in part, why 52% of employees surveyed in a 2020 study didn't even know their company's purpose. This study also found that 20% of employees don't believe leaders truly uphold organizational values.

A perceived lack of integrity arises when there's a contradiction between leaders' narratives and the changes they want to make.

To increase support, leaders must craft a narrative that connects people's actions with the desired future. Employees need to see how their work contributes to the bigger picture, including the "why" behind a change initiative. Is it in response to major cultural or business shifts? Why now? How will the change help the organization fulfill its purpose?

Most importantly, leaders need to address the "what's in it for me?" We can't ignore self-interest. People are driven by both functional and emotional motivations. They won't support a change initiative if leaders can't present clear benefits for them.

4. Loss Of Belonging

Belonging is critical for teams to thrive, making us feel like part of a tribe. A strong sense of belonging is tied to feeling connected, included and supported by other team members.

Harry Levinson, who established the link between job conditions and emotional health, famously said, "All change is loss, and loss must be mourned." When employees perceive that their workplace culture has changed, they feel excluded, as if they've lost a place they consider home.

To maintain a sense of belonging during a culture transformation, it's vital to create a sense of continuity by connecting the past with the future. Often, leaders focus too much on the change—the new—and dismiss the value of past

practices and traditions. Instead of getting rid of all previous practices, leaders must understand what doesn't work/stopped working and what is working.

To overcome the loss of belonging, it's vital to build a bridge between the past and present. Don't just focus on what will change. Also, emphasize what "will stay the same."

5. Loss Of Reputation
Most employees don't feel valued at all or feel just somewhat valued. Undervalued employees can lead to disengaged workers. This becomes more critical as organizations go through a culture transformation.

Can I do it? Emphasizing the new skills and mindsets required can exclude people from change. People are worried about becoming obsolete, and that quickly affects their self-worth—their reputation.

Change is a departure from the "way we (used to) do things here." Being associated with the past can make people feel they're no longer valued—and even make them feel threatened. It's vital to acknowledge past contributions while also actively working on reskilling and upskilling employees.

Leaders should invest in equipping people with the right mindsets, tools, software and skills to be ready for what's next. Intentionally transitioning from the old model to the new one can help people prepare for what's next. Most importantly, lead the transformation with a trial-and-error mentality: Focus on progress and learning, not perfection.

Whether you are a leader or HR executive, stop fighting resistance. Understand and empathize with the loss instead. Use this canvas with your team to reframe losses into wins.

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