

Bringing About Change

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*Resistance to doing things a new way is not uncommon.
Here's how to get around it.*

Ever walk out of a meeting just shaking your head? Wondering, how can they find so many reasons why your recommendation won't work? We know that people are resistant to change that they don't influence, but sometimes it seems we just can't get them to influence any change at all.

The first step in overcoming resistance to change is to understand what is being resisted. The Theory of Constraints (TOC) has developed a very effective system to help us discover the answer to that question. Let's take a quick look at the TOC layers of resistance.

Disagreement on what to change

- I don't believe there is a problem to solve.
- I think the problem is something else.
- I can't control the problem, so why am I here?

Disagreement on what to change to

- I have a different direction for the solution.
- This solution is insufficient.
- This solution has some real downside to it.

Disagreement on how to change

- This solution cannot be implemented.
- I don't know how to implement this solution.
- I'm just afraid to make this change.

In many conversations about change, there is disagreement. We state our case, we debate, we argue, sometimes we even yell. But much of that is a waste of time. Often we don't even know what we're disagreeing about. It pays to work your way through the three fundamental issues, and the related nine layers of resistance, when trying to make a change.

This model does not intend to preclude differences of opinion; it simply helps everyone in the room understand where the true differences lie. Debate is an important part of the change process. But at least be clear on what you are debating.

To get the most out of this system of peeling away resistance to change, avoid asking a yes/no question for

each of the nine layers. The unspoken "but" after the spoken "yes" or "no" is where the real information lies.

For example, let's look at the yes/no question "Do we all agree there is a problem?" A "yes" may mean "I'm too tired to argue," or "yes, but it's not the one you're talking about." "No" may mean "no, but if we look at it just a bit differently I will agree." Instead of the yes/no question, perhaps you could ask each participant to talk about why he or she think there is a problem, believes the problem you're discussing is the real problem, and thinks he or she should influence the solution. The environment must be safe for voiced disagreement or confusion at this stage. If you ignore dissent at this stage, you will be returning to the topic down the line, after much time and energy has been spent. You will be exasperated, thinking "Aren't we way past that issue?" You can't expect your fellow employees to implement a change they see no need for. You can't expect them to implement a change when they don't agree with the nature of the solution. You can't expect them to implement a change they don't believe is possible.

Frequently someone will voice an objection at a higher level of resistance - "This just isn't doable" - but is really concerned at a much lower level - they don't see the problem, or they see the solution as insufficient. Do not accept the words of objections as the real basis of objection. Work your way through the layers of resistance, in order. In doing so, the team is likely to have a clearer idea of what the problem is, of alternative solutions, and of undesirable effects and weaknesses of the solutions. And importantly, the group will have identified and addressed resistance to change.

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Verify:

- Do you have agreement on what the problem is?
- Do you have agreement on what to change to?
- Do you have agreement on how to make the change?

The likelihood of successful change is much greater if the answer to each is yes. You may find yourself walking out of those meetings still shaking your head, only now at just how well your fellow employees are working to improve and change the organization.



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