Managing Resistance To Change

Idea In Short

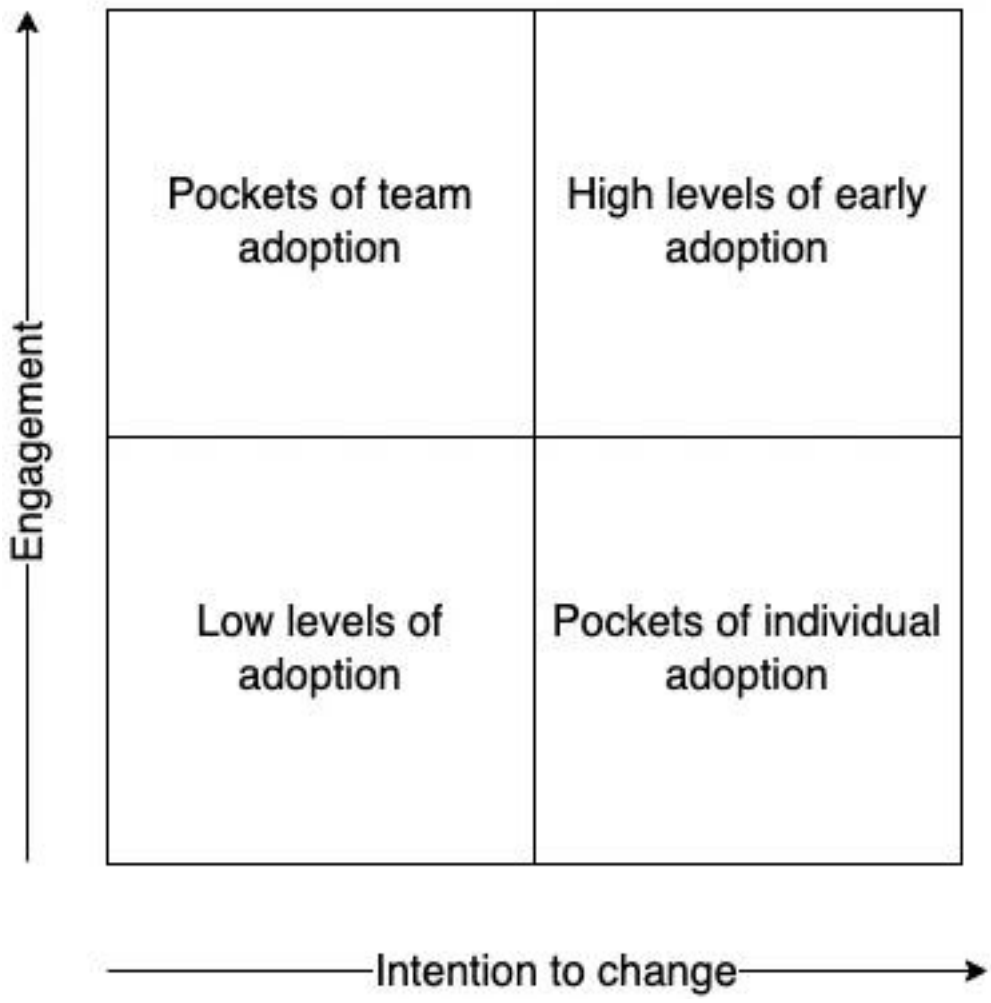
Without exception, all popular change management models tell us to expect resistance to change and for managing resistance to be planned for formally. Some models encourage us to complete a resistance to change plan identifying the likely sources of resistance, be that cohorts of people or general reactions to change activities completed, as part of the change or notions about the change. Additionally, we are advised that to reduce resistance to change we should ensure that we do change right the first time.

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Research by Prosci (Prosci, 2018) conducted over many years revealed that over 40% of responding organisations believe that more than 50% of the resistance encountered in their change projects is avoidable. Less than 10% believe that the resistance they encountered in their change projects was unavoidable. Managing resistance has proved avoidable but difficult in many organisations.

What is less clear, is how to avoid that resistance in the first place, and:

do change right the first time



required for change to occur

To develop the changes in behavior and actions desired from a change, two things must occur:

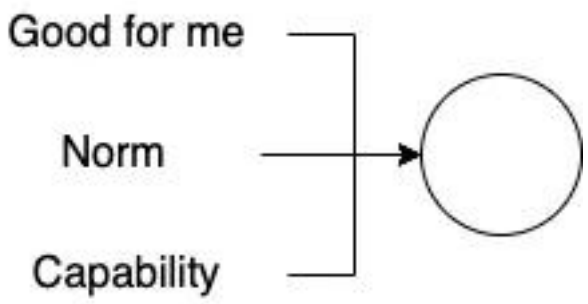
1. the cohorts of individuals that will form a critical mass for the change to be successful, must develop a personal intention to change, and
2. line managers of these cohorts of individuals need to provide an environment where that intention to change can be converted into action and the new behaviors reinforced until they become the norm.

Environment for change model

From the Theory of Planned Behavior (Aizen, 2018), we know that an individual's attitude toward the new behaviors, the subjective norms regarding the new behaviors, and their perceived behavioral control, combined with their experience with similar changes, together

shape an individual's behavioral intentions.

- **Attitude:** People need to have a positive belief about the behavioral changes required and the change overall and that belief must be "top of mind"
- **Subjective norm:** People need to believe that the changed behaviors and actions are the norm and it is good in their social circle to follow that norm
- **Perceived behavioral control:** People believe they have the necessary skills and knowledge, access to information and authority to execute the new behaviors and actions. And the baggage they carry from previous change efforts does not negate the belief they have in their capability and capacity to be successful with this change.
  Intention to change

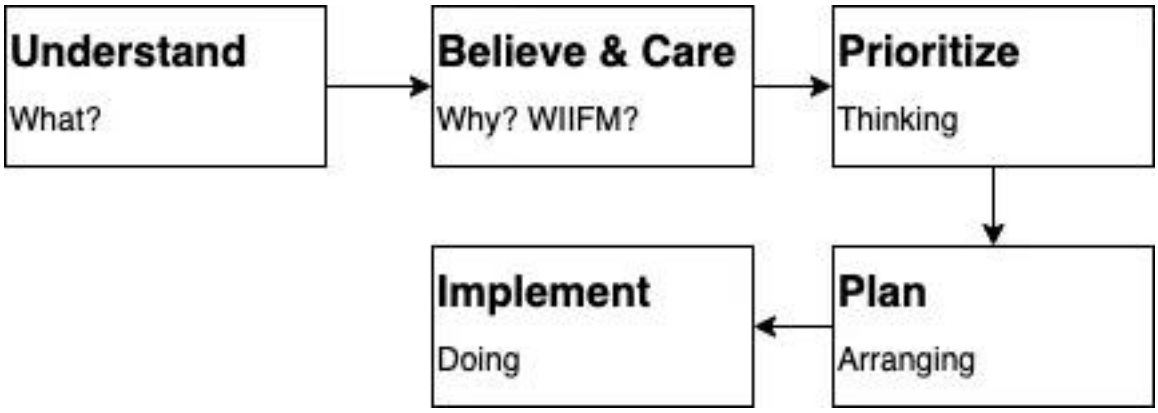


Theory of Planned Behavior – Forming the intention to change

We also know, that to truly engage line management, we need to ensure that they have traversed all five stages of engagement:

1. understanding the change
2. caring and believing in the change
3. prioritizing activities regarding the change
4. planning for the change
5. executing all the activities required to fully embrace the change

Stages of Engagement



of engagement

Planning Change

The Heath brothers, (Heath & Heath, 2010) give us some good pointers, how, at the individual level, and line management level, we can improve our ability to obviate the need to manage resistance, by "doing change right the first time". The authors advice is to use a very basic three-part framework to guide us in any situation where we need to change behavior:

Provide clarity in direction

Individuals: Without clarity in the expected behaviors and actions, it is impossible for individuals to form consistent beliefs about the personal changes they may have to make. Rather, they will fill in the gaps, often erroneously, and resist perceptions of the changes they must make, the support they will receive to give them the necessary capability and capacity to change and it is impossible to develop any cohesive social pressures as each individual will have differing perceptions of what is reality.

> For example, imagine we are undertaking a major effort to improve the share of wallet of each transaction we have with customers, the level and frequency of repurchase and the reach of recommendations to people who currently do not buy from us. Imagine that we are focusing on the level of service we provide our existing customers to impact each of those three elements. If, as I have often seen be the case, we offer training in generic customer service to instil in our frontline workers a belief in customer service is being part of our vision and therefore something they should believe in and practice. Even when these training programs are quite good at providing both the rationale for providing good customer service, the elements that make up good customer service, case studies and practice sessions about good

and poor customer service they are insufficient to provide the clarity required by people to understand the changes required in their behaviors and actions to achieve the goals and targets we have set out to reach

What is necessary in addition to generic training, that builds belief in the need to provide good customer service, is training that is more specific about elements including, but not limited to, the way we expect staff to interact with customers in different circumstances and questioning and listening skills and product knowledge. Being more specific allows people to understand both the changes in behavior required, and make rational evaluation as to whether they have a positive belief about the changes or not. It also helps their perception that they have the capability and capacity to execute the change behaviors back in the workplace.

To further improve the probability of transferring this learning back to the workplace and making our expectations clear, we also need a performance management approach that rewards improvements in skill and knowledge required to execute the desired behaviors and actions. This is in addition to or instead of, rewarding actual behaviors and actions and end results. It is insufficient to reward just the end results as this does not make it clear what is the new subjective norm regarding customer service.

Line Managers: Using the same customer service example, without clarity about what the changes are, what the benefits for the line manager and their teams are, what we expect them to do, what to plan, how to plan and what to execute and measure, line managers are not truly engaged. They are unable to evaluate whether they should prioritise the actions they need to take to support their team over the many other things they need to do each day, week or month. Each of the line managers will instead execute to their best efforts at the level of interest they personally have in providing better customer service.

This is a frequent error in the planning of change management programs. We complete a sponsor roadmap or stakeholder management plan without being specific enough for line managers to be consistent in their approach. We fail to understand and cater for, the varying levels of support different line managers, with different backgrounds and experiences and personalities, need to achieve anywhere near a consistent approach. The outcome of inconsistent approaches is a high degree of variation in the degree to which intentions formed by individuals to change are converted into consistent actions, that our customers

experience.

Engage people's emotional side

Individuals: Numerous studies (THOMPSON, 2018) have revealed, that the long-held economists view that consumers of goods, services and advice, make rational decisions is wrong. People make emotional decisions the majority of times, including in the workplace. As well as giving clarity to people on the detail of the change as it pertains to them, we need to equally, and at times, more strongly, give them an emotional reason for making the change. Emotional reasons will enable them to have a strong belief in the change and to encourage others to accept the change is the norm. Emotional reasons also give people strength in going through the process of building the capability and capacity they need to execute the new behaviors and actions.

Emotional reasons are personal. However, in any change we should be able to determine for different cohorts of people what the key emotional reasons are likely to be. The usual suspects are personal reasons such as power, status, freedom, authority and purpose. Or they may be more community minded reasons such as the environment, social cohesion and social betterment. Or they may be internal to the organisation and its clients in terms of teamwork, customer satisfaction or industry recognition.

By giving individuals a reason to believe other than pure logic, we give them intangible reasons to persevere and to adapt and adopt new behaviors and actions. Intangible reasons which often a stronger than the rational reasons we may communicate in the case for change.

Line Managers: A key point in the engagement journey for line managers, is the point at which they begin to prioritize the activities they need to pursue to plan and implement the changes required over other activities they might otherwise have pursued. In some organisational cultures, this may be done by a command control exercise. However, having line managers reach this point because they care and believe in the change even for irrational over rational reasons gives rise to a set of management behaviors, which are stronger, last much longer and are resistant to issues which otherwise might cause a reversion to old behaviors.

Shape the path people can take

Individuals: Quite often in a change environment we mistake people's reaction to the situation they find themselves in for intransigence or resistance. The situation that people can find themselves in can alter their perception of the change, their perception of the subjective norm and their perception of their capability and capacity to make the change. We often see this in information technology implementations, where what appears to be people's resistance to using a new system is a mismatch between the new system and existing processes that the new system takes data from or provides data and information to. In one organisation, which set out to make a major transformation of its billing systems, using what would have been then seen as a radical project management process, given that it was in the early days of agile, they used very short development and approval times for small pieces of work but did not put in place a sufficiently robust testing program to identify and root out system errors and/or process mismatches before going live and treating the system is business as usual. The result was a large blowout in credit which was blamed on users' resistance, which was in fact, result of an unworkable system, not a people problem.

At a simpler level, we often make it more complicated for people to adopt new behaviors and actions than then we should. I have often heard the phrase, "we hire smart people" as a reason for not making a little more effort in making it easier for people to execute the actions we require. The simpler and easier we can make it for people to execute actions we require the easier it will be for them to perceive the change is good thing, the easier it will be for them perceive that this should be the subjective norm and the easier it is for them to perceive that they will have the capability and capacity to execute the new behaviors and actions.

Line Managers: We can make the path easier for line managers by giving them templates processes and methods for planning and implementing. We can make it easy to book training, or for getting extra resources when they must take key staff of their day-to-day role to allow them to participate in project teams and project meetings or to make decisions or to answer questions from their staff. Shaping the path for line managers and showing them that we will shape the path for them also makes it easier for them to believe that this change is going different and to care enough to prioritize it over their other activities associated with their role.

Summary

Managing resistance to change is not about generic processes, feel good social functions, punishment and rewards or command and control. It is about understanding how people will view the change logically and emotionally and in trying to influence that and understand what help they need to make the execution of the changes in behaviors and actions easy to do.