

Change and Resistance Help for the Practitioner of Change

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Abstract

Change and the resistance to change has been a common occurrence probably since before recorded time. It is normal to resist that which may bring unfamiliarity and the unknown into ones life.

As practitioners, who in the course of our professions frequently create change we know that there will be resistance. Often though, we do not know how to avoid it or at least minimize it.

What is a practitioner to do, where do they start? In an effort to help the practitioner this paper will summarize the findings of a selection of relevant articles, both the why of resistance and the what to do's. Then we will look at three models of change management. The hope is that with this information the practitioner will be better equipped to guide the change to a satisfactory conclusion for all involved.

1. Introduction

Resistance to change, what is it? Why does it happen? According to one view, "... the natural human response to change is resistance. People become attached to familiar ways of doing things, even ways they initially regarded as cumbersome, costly, or ineffective. ...In essence, life is a series of attempts to resist change, sometimes to incorporate a change that can't be opposed, and then to resist any new changes." [4]. Resistance, what it is and why it happens, are still open questions. The literature is filled with articles concerning change and resistance, identifying it and what to do about it, even to this day.

Through all of these years of investigation, we have not found all the answers at least as indicated by the fact that we are still investigating it. When performing a literature search utilizing the key words of change, resistance, and management of change there will be hundreds of articles returned even when limiting the search to the last 5 or 10 years. Therefore, a review of a selection of the literature and a look at models of change management is in order. It can possibly be summarized and used as a starting point for practitioners in their day-to-day work.

2. Resistance and change

What is resistance to change? For that matter, what is change? "Change is a simple process. At least, it's simple to describe. It occurs whenever we replace the old with the new. Change is about traveling from the old to the new, leaving yesterday behind in exchange for a new tomorrow." [7]. Seems straightforward does it not? de Jager continues, "But implementing change is incredibly difficult. Most people are reluctant to leave the familiar behind. We are all suspicious about the unfamiliar; we are naturally concerned about how we get from the old to the new, especially if it involves learning something new and risking failure." [7]. As de Jager stated there are a variety of reasons for resisting change, some of them perfectly valid reasons, some not. An example or two may be helpful in clarifying the idea of valid resistance. "Imagine a hunter in the distant past who hunted saber-toothed tigers with a long, heavy, sharp spear. Now present the imaginary hunter with a bow and arrow. The hunter would be well advised to get some proof that this flimsy strip of wood, strung with a bit of twisted hair, and a tiny spear with feathers on the end are more effective than his large, heavy, sturdy, dangerous, and well tested spear." [7]. "Examples of significant change are not limited to a single industry. The telephone, while initially thought to be only for the elite, has changed global communication. The Internet first thought of as a curiosity of academics and government researchers, is fundamentally changing the global economy." [5].

Advocates of change may 'know' that it will work and that this change will make things 'better' but they are usually not the ones affected by the change. The ones affected by the change are the ones that need to be convinced. Of course, there are other reasons that change is resisted, which we will now look at.

Keens' 1981 paper on long-term change in organizations with relation to Information Systems drew upon sources from areas such as Behavioral Theory, Management Science, Operations Research, Trade Journals and many more, Keen realized that organizations are pluralistic in nature. That in attempting to manage

change, one had to rely on incremental, facilitative approaches especially when contemplating strategic change, which requires coalition building and attention to political mechanisms [12]. In Keens' work, he looked specifically at resistance, (inertia), as it related to information systems. Keen identified four main causes of inertia:

- “(1) Information is only a small component of organizational decision processes;
- (2) Human Information-processing is experimental and relies on simplification;
- (3) Organizations are complex and change is incremental and evolutionary; large steps are avoided, even resisted;
- (4) Data are not merely an intellectual commodity but a political resource, whose distribution through new information systems affects the interests of particular groups.”[12]

While causes one and two are important, causes three and four have some interesting implications. “The more complex the organization, the less likely the impact of technological change; homeostatic, self-equilibrating forces in loosely coupled systems are a major explanation for the frequency of failure of large-scale planning projects.”[12] This means the complexity of the organization acts as a leveling force that counter balances the change. Bringing us to number four, “Data are a central political resource. Many agents and units in organizations get their influence and autonomy from their control over information. They will not readily give that up.”[12] Change then can affect the distribution of influence and autonomy. Are these concepts supported by other research?

“Is there resistance to the new technologies and the new approaches to doing business? Of course, there is. From a MOC perspective, there are three reasons why people resist change:

1. People resist, because they lack the skills to use and gain benefits from the new technologies.
2. There is resistance because employees in the traditional companies and industries do not understand the ‘big picture’ and how the application of the new technologies changes how business is done and processes executed.
3. Finally, resistance, especially in middle and upper management, comes from the fact that new technologies and their translation into new business models redefine the organizational structures and the power bases.”[17].

Note: MOC is Management of Change.

These reasons are an example from Mowshowitz of Technicism as it puts blame on the user and none on the implementer. To Mowshowitz “The technician views the computer as an instrument of progress. This is an article of faith based on neither experience nor reason. The technician defines the success or failure of particular

computer applications in terms of systems design and implementation.”[16] In the technician's view, the user is not involved in the design or possibly any other phase of the development of the application. Would Keen view the technician's attitude as a cause of resistance?

This brings us to a quote from Oz and Sosik as given by Charles (2002) as to why system projects are abandoned:

“... • Poor Communications...

- Lack of a motivation/incentive system...”[2].

“Skeptics would say that it was the change itself that led to the failures described above. The problem might have more to do with how the change was managed. Many ERP engagements are said to fail not because of technical problems, but because management paid insufficient attention to change management issues”[1].

Bagranoff et al listed six reasons why people fear change:

4. Leaving the “comfort zone.”
5. Loss of position.
6. New responsibilities.
7. Higher expectations.
8. Loss of power and influence.
9. Past experience.

Summarized from [1].

Similarly, from Davidson;

“• Embracing change takes time and effort that the participants may not want to invest.

- Taking on something new largely means giving up something else that is familiar, comfortable, and predictable.

- Annoyance or fear of disruption may stop people from taking first steps, even when they know that the net result will greatly benefit them.

- If change is imposed externally, not derived internally, resistance may be ego-related.”[4].

Davidson brings an interesting observation to light; “Managing change is challenging enough when a group meets at the same location. It is magnified when targets of change report in from a distance by e-mail, phone, and fax.”[4]. Therefore, resistance to change may also be a function of one's location to others being affected by the change. In this age of global companies, a change in one location can have profound affect on other locations.

“Employees often don't see the value of performing their jobs differently or taking on new roles, or they don't trust the reasons for change in the first place, says Chris Butler, president of The Performance Engineering Group. “If they don't support the change, they won't alter their behavior and the project can't succeed.””[8].

Maurer reinforces this idea; “People ask two fundamental questions when confronted with the thought of changing: *Why* do we need to change? And *how* can we make the change work? Often we forget to address the *why* question, and we move directly to the *how* question. This is dangerous because people are not interested in *how* to accomplish something when they don't see *why* it's

important.”[14] Looking at most of the above articles one must ask, was the ‘why’ explained before or early in the process? Could explaining the ‘why’ reduce the occurrence of resistance?

To emphasize the impact of change and resistance consider one of the largest integration projects currently being undertaken is the effort to create, bring to fruition, the Department of Homeland Security, (DHS). “Steve, the CIO and senior director for information integration at OHS, faces the daunting task of integrating the hundreds of systems in the 22 agencies and programs that are currently slated to make up DHS. An even taller order though, might be getting the 170,000 workers in these agencies to look past the different agendas, histories, cultures and processes and act as members of a holistic enterprise, whether they sit in the Coast Guard or the Customs Service or the Nuclear Incident Response units.” [6]. Note: OHS is Office of Homeland Security

Summarizing, the common causes of resistance are:

- Reluctance to leave comfort zones, things which are familiar
- Not understanding why change is necessary, lack of communication
- Possible loss of power or influence
- The amount of change required could be overwhelming or requires an investment that they may not wish to make.

Various authors suggest other reasons but these are the common threads in many discussions of resistance.

Knowing this, what can be done to overcome resistance or at least anticipate it? We need now to look at some models for managing change.

3. Models of change management

Davidson quotes Management expert Peter Drucker as saying; “For new technology to be embraced, it has to have 10 times the advantages of what people previously did.”[4].

If the change has to be 10 times more effective, then we need to have a methodology or model to effect the change.

In the literature, three models of change stand out from the others in term of references to them:

1. Kotter’s eight-step model for transforming organizations [13].
2. Jick’s ten-step model for implementing change [10].
3. General Electric’s (GE) seven-step model for accelerating change [9].

Looking at hundreds of companies and their efforts to remake themselves developed Kotter’s model. While a few were successful and a few were failures the majority were somewhere in-between and so were as the phrase

goes, less successful than originally envisioned. From this Kotter learned several lessons and codified them into eight steps. The first and probably most important lesson is that change takes time and must be done in phases. While skipping steps seems like you are progressing faster, it is in fact only illusional and does not produce the results desired. The second lesson is that critical mistakes can have severe impact, slowing the change and negating previous gains.

Kotter’s eight steps are:

1. Establish a sense of urgency.
2. Create a guiding coalition.
3. Develop a vision and strategy.
4. Communicate that vision.
5. Empower employees for broad-based action.
6. Generate short-term wins.
7. Consolidate gains to produce deeper change.
8. Anchor the change in the culture.

(Summarized Kotter [13].

Jick in his 1991 paper introduced ten steps or commandments:

1. Analyze the organization and its need for change
2. Create a shared vision and common direction
3. Separate from the past
4. Create a strong sense of urgency
5. Support a strong leader role
6. Line up political sponsorship
7. Craft an implementation plan
8. Develop enabling structures
9. Communicate, involve people, and be honest
10. Reinforce and institutionalize change

As can be seen there is an overlap of Kotter and Jick.

The GE model came from an extended large-scale reorganization done at GE and reported by Garvin [9].

The seven steps are:

1. Clear explanation of reasons for change
2. Establish the vision
3. Line up leadership
4. Mobilize the workforce (make them part of planning/definition of change)
5. Measure the progress
6. Maintain consistency / stay the course
7. Change the systems and structures

(Summarized from Garvin [9])

We can see that the GE model also overlaps Kotter and Jick. To start comparing the models let us put them in a table by their steps.

	Kotter	Jick	GE
1	Establish a sense of urgency	Analyze the organization and its need for change	Explain the reason for the change

2	Create a guiding coalition	Create a shared vision and common direction	Establish the vision
3	Develop a vision and strategy	Separate from the past	Line up leadership
4	Communicate that vision	Create a strong sense of urgency	Mobilize the workforce
5	Empower employees for broad-based action	Support a strong leader role	Measure the progress
6	Generate short-term wins	Line up political sponsorship	Stay the course
7	Consolidate gains to produce deeper change	Craft an implementation plan	Change the systems and structures
8	Anchor the change in the culture	Develop enabling structures	
9		Communicate, involve people, and be honest	
10		Reinforce and institutionalize change	

From this, we can map Jick and GE to Kotter.

Kotter	Jick	GE
1 Establish a sense of urgency	4 Create a strong sense of urgency	1 Explain the reason for the change
2 Create a guiding coalition	5 Support a strong leader role 6 Line up political sponsorship	3 Line up leadership
3 Develop a vision and strategy	2 - Create a shared vision and common direction	2 Establish the vision
4 Communicate that vision	9 Communicate, involve people, and be honest	
5 Empower employees for broad-based action	8 Develop enabling structures	4 Mobilize the workforce
6 Generate short-term wins.	7 Craft an implementation plan	
7 Consolidate gains to produce deeper change		
8 Anchor the change in the	10 Reinforce and institutionalize	7 Change systems and

culture.	change	structures
	1 Analyze the organization and its need for change	5 Measure the progress
	3 Separate from the past	6 Stay the course

This is a somewhat arbitrary mapping and one could argue for some modification of the placements but it does show, for the most part, an overlap of these models. Enough of an overlap that given how often they appear in the literature and have been used in transforming organizations we can assume a certain amount of validity to their premise.

As an example of that overall validity, Bagranoff et al distilled the change management process down to four essential steps:

1. Establish the need for change
2. Develop vision and a business case
3. Get a quick win
4. Align the organizational structure and performance measurement systems [1].

Their steps fit within the overall model nicely.

A few examples may help to lend credence to the overall concept of the models.

In December 2000, a paper in MIS Quarterly examined the re-engineering of First American Corporation (FAC). In that paper, they explicitly used Kotter's model to examine the change process that occurred at FAC. "One possible explanation for FAC's success in using a new business strategy to change the organization infrastructure is that its transformation effort followed Kotter's prescription almost exactly." [3].

FAC was a bank holding company that was under 'Letters of Agreement' with regulators thus creating a sense of urgency (step 1). The strategy decided upon was created by a coalition that included the CEO and senior management, (step 2). The strategy itself was a vision of the future that was believable and compelling (step 3). They communicated that vision (step 4). As part of the vision, tools were provided that let the users use the system in a variety of ways that matched their needs (step 5). The roll out was phased and so allowed for quick, visible wins (step 6). Each phased rollout built upon the earlier ones, and so incorporated the lessons gained (step 7). Organizational practices and procedures were changed to match the new vision (step 8).

The second example is from Mento, Jones and Dirndorfer [15]. In this paper, the authors examine the three models and from them created a framework for change at a defense contractor. They arrived at a 12-step framework that combined and expanded the steps of the three models we are looking at. During the discussion of the framework, the mapping and justification of the steps were described as well as how it fit into the changes being

undertaken at the defense contractor. In this case, they specifically justified the actions using the three models, thus indicating the usefulness of the models in accomplishing change.

An example from a different point of view is from Charles 2002. Charles categorizes her project by quoting Oz and Sosik "the project had been completed, but the system is not fully used by its intended users." Then she lists reasons why she believes it was less than successful:

- Lack of strong, consistent management support (Kotter step 2, Jick steps 5 & 6, GE step 3)
- Project scope too large for the available resources (Kotter Step 6, Jick Step 7)
- Poor communication (Kotter step 4, Jick steps 9)
- No preparation for a "knowledge culture" (Kotter 7)
- Lack of motivation/Incentive system (Kotter 1 & 5, Jick 4 & 8, GE 1 & 4)

These are all violations of the models and based on the models it is obvious why the project was 'less than successful'.

4. Examination of change strategies

If we grant the validity of the overall models based on their citations and usage, we can now look at the articles concerning resistance and examine them from the viewpoint of the models.

Bagranoff et al tell us that "Change management is a process, a series of steps designed to move a person from point A to point B:..."[1].

To examine their points in detail:

"Develop vision and a business case. ...The business case should convince members of the organization that the proposed change is the best way for the organization to achieve its vision." Kotter's step 3, Jick's and GE's step 2.

"Get a quick win. ...The implication for change management is that a quick win is important in building buy-in to the change." Kotter's step 6, Jick's step 7.

"Develop management and stake-holder commitment. Generating a quick win and making a convincing business case should obtain commitment from managers and stakeholders, whose dedicated support can be the key to a successful change effort." Kotter's step 2 & 6, Jick's steps 5, 6 & 7 and GE's step 3.

"Align the organizational structure and performance measurement systems." Kotter's step 8, Jick's step 10 and GE's step 7 [1].

We see that Bagranoff et al follow some of the steps of the three models but not all of them.

Davidson's article is not a research article but a commentary on overcoming resistance. In it though, he speaks to inducing commitment, quoting Daryl Conner, "securing commitment among targets early on wins "bodies and souls", whereas failing to do so may win

"bodies but not souls."[4]. This speaks to Kotter steps 1, 2 & 3, Jick steps 4, 2 & 9 and GE steps 1 and 2.

Davis et al discuss the method and speed of introduction of change and that they both can greatly affect the reactions of individuals. They give examples of decision making as a method of involving the individual in the change process. (Kotter step 5, Jick step 8, GE step 4) Training, they say may not directly help to make the change because of the inability to transfer skills to the workplace, but they say it may improve their confidence that the change will succeed. "By providing appropriate strategic, economic, financial, material, and human resources, much resistance can be avoided." (Kotter step 5 & 6, Jick step 8 & 7, GE step 4) "Locus of control is the degree to which a person perceives that their destiny is within their control, as opposed to controlled by an outside force or individual." (Kotter step 5, Jick step 8, GE step 4) Summarized from Davis [5]. Again while there is not a direct mapping to all the steps of the models there is mapping to several of the steps.

de Jager focuses on questions that should be addressed in the change process. Such things as:

1. Why is the old status quo no longer sufficient?
2. What will it cost to make the transition from the old way of doing things to the "new-fangled method"?
3. Is this "cost of transition" justified by the incremental benefits of what is being proposed?
4. Does the proposed change support and reinforce existing core values? Summarized from De Jager [7].

These questions are ones that are likely to be raised and therefore would be addressed in Kotter steps 1,3, 4 & 8, Jick steps 4, 2, 9 & 10, GE steps 1, 2, & 7.

Datz in discussing the problems confronting the Department of Homeland Security says "The second, and more important, reason that this department can succeed is its mission: to save lives and protect property. That will be incentive enough for many people to discard their agency hats for new, larger-size homeland security headgear."[6] This is obviously Kotter step 1, Jick step 4 and GE step 1. We cannot say what will happen but this statement speaks to the power of that first step, the sense of urgency.

Joffe and Glynn (2002) discuss how an organization involved their employees at all levels in an effort to improve productivity and retention and to make the organization "a great place to work." [11] The interesting factor in this paper is in the section on the solutions: "The change initiative was broadly informed by Kotter's (1996) 'Eight-Stage Process'" [11] As one reads the paper, major section headings are steps in Kotter's model and the discussion reflects how that step was applied to the organization. They used a series of surveys to measure employee response to the changes and based on the results of each survey, addressed issues found. The

employees were e-mailed a link to a web survey that was hosted on an external site to ensure confidentiality. They note that the first survey had a 90 per cent response rate, which they attributed to “the passion everyone felt for changing the Center...”[11]. An analysis of their work shows that the surveys and the ‘wave’ teams who addressed those surveys used them as tools to empower the employees (Kotter step 5, Jick step 8, GE step 4), to generate short term wins (Kotter step 6, Jick step 7), consolidating the gains and anchoring them in the culture. (Kotter steps 7 & 8, Jick step 10, GE step 7)

A paper of great interest is Keen’s work: Information Systems and Organizational Change in 1981. This paper is often cited and is considered a seminal work. However, it was written years before the models we are looking at. Keen states “Implementation *is* possible but requires patience and a strategy that recognizes that the change process must be explicitly managed.”[12] The very idea that is the basis for our three models, i.e., that change must be managed. Does Keen have more to say that helps us in looking at the models? Keen, in the conclusion, states:

“The outline seems clear:

(1) A senior level fixer must head the Information function; he or she must have full authority and resources to negotiate with or between users and with those affected by information systems; (Kotter step 2, Jick step 5 & 6, GE step 3)

(2) There must be some policy planning or steering committee, which includes senior line managers; ... (Kotter step 2, Jick step 5 & 6, GE step 3)

(3) The planning process will require substantial time and effort in the *predesign* stages, where objectives are made operational and evolution of the larger system is defined by breaking it into clear phases; (Kotter step 3, Jick step 2, GE step 2)

(4) Formal contracts will be needed, in which commitments must be clearly made ... (loosely maps to Kotter step 4, Jick step 9)

(5) “Hybrid” skills must be developed in systems staff; they cannot dismiss organizational and political issues as irrelevant or not their responsibility, but must be able to operate in the manager’s world and build credibility across the organization.” (Kotter step 5, Jick step 8, GE step 4) [12].

This is good news for our models and practitioners as it increases our ‘faith’ in the models.

5. Summary for the practitioner

As our focus is to help the practitioner, we need to summarize the findings in a way that makes them useful to that practitioner. We have seen we can often map the various author’s ideas to the step of the models. We also

have had examples where the authors specifically used one or more of the models to guide their work.

With just the selected few papers we have looked at, we find a strong mapping to most of the steps of the models. In fact, except for step 7, (Consolidate gains to produce deeper change); the steps are cited at least 5 times with the maximum being 8. Step 7 is probably something that practitioners do not realize they are doing. Step 7 speaks to consolidation of change, but what is that? Is it not what we do when we implement in phases, each one built upon the foundation of it predecessors? As we implement

Kotter	Jick	GE	Times Mapped
1 Establish a sense of urgency	4 Create a strong sense of urgency	1 Explain the reason for the change	8
2 Create a guiding coalition	5 Support a strong leader role 6 Line up political sponsorship	3 Line up leadership	5
3 Develop a vision and strategy	2 - Create a shared vision and common direction	2 Establish the vision	7
4 Communicate that vision	9 Communicate involve people, and be honest		5
5 Empower employees for broad-based action	8 Develop enabling structures	4 Mobilize the workforce	5
6 Generate short term wins.	7 Craft an implementation plan		5
7 Consolidate gains to produce deeper change			2
8 Anchor the change in the culture.	10 Reinforce and institutionalize change	7 Change systems and structures	6

in phases we look at the prior phase(s) and incorporate the

lessons learned, the procedures and processes that were changed into our future changes.

For the practitioner this says that all the above steps are important, some may be more obvious than others may, but none can be skipped or shunted aside.

6. Conclusion

We have looked at resistance and why it occurs. Then in looking at three of the more common models of change, we found that there is a commonality between them, which we can map. We also found that among the authors who discussed resistance and offered ideas to manage the change that many of their ideas map to the models. As practitioners, this is valuable; we have a guide that we can use. We still need to keep in touch with the literature, but we have a framework for implementing change. A framework that allows us to judge future studies as we implement change in our organizations.

7. References

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