

Employee Relations and Wellbeing

Lecture Title:

Managing Change and Resistance



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**Masters in
Human Resources Management**

Learning Objectives

- Identify sources of resistance to organizational change**
- Evaluate the ER implications of restructuring and transformation**
- Design communication strategies that foster trust during change**



Group Debate

Split in two groups and debate the following phrases re change:-

- 1. Change is essential for growth—organizations that resist change are doomed to fail."***
- 2. "Too much change too quickly creates chaos—stability and consistency matter more than constant transformation."***



“Resistance to change is the deliberate or unconscious behavior by individuals or groups within an organization that acts to oppose, delay, or undermine planned changes, often arising from fear, uncertainty, or perceived threats to established routines, roles, or organizational norms.”

Dent & Goldberg (1999).



Types of Resistance

- **Individual resistance** – Emotional or behavioral reactions of employees, e.g., fear , anxiety, skepticism, loss of motivation.
- **Organizational resistance** – Structural or systemic barriers within the organizations e.g., rigid hierarchies, outdated processes, lack of resources, or entrenched culture.



Common Sources Of Resistance To Change

Source of Resistance	Example
Fear of Loss	Employees worried that automation will make their roles redundant
Uncertainty / Lack of Understanding	Staff unsure how a new reporting system will affect their daily work
Poor Communication	Employees receive vague emails about restructuring without details
Organizational Culture	A hierarchical culture resisting collaborative decision-making initiatives
Habit / Comfort with Status Quo	Employees continue using old procedures despite new policies
Mistrust of Leadership	Staff skeptical about management promises of “positive change”
Perceived Negative Impact	Workers resist adopting new software fearing increased monitoring



Psychological Models of Resistance

The Kubler-Ross Change Curve

This psychological model was adapted from Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's work on the stages of grief (1969). It illustrates how individuals emotionally respond to significant change, showing that resistance often stems from natural emotional reactions rather than deliberate opposition.

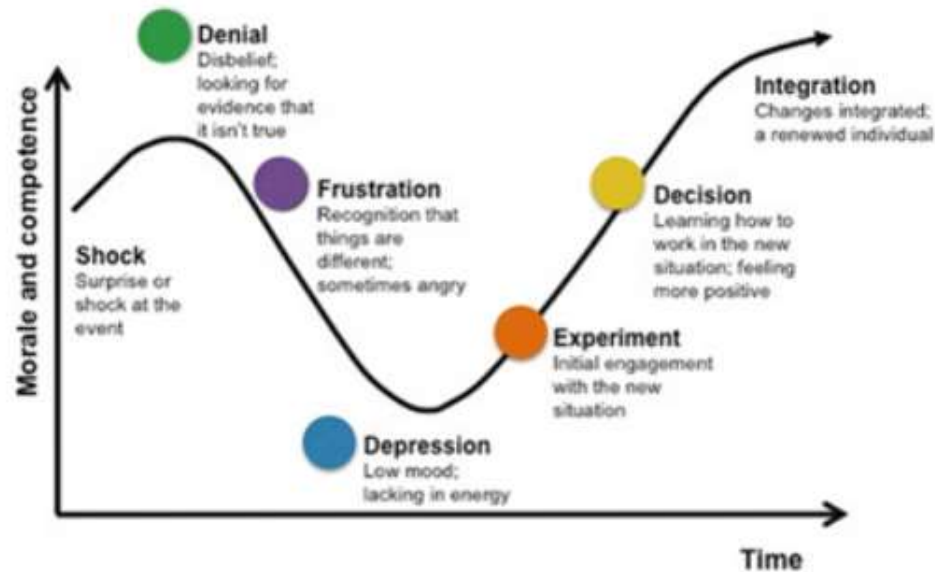
The model outlines five key stages:

- 1. Denial:** Initial shock or disbelief; employees may downplay the significance of change.
- 2. Anger:** Frustration or resentment as individuals recognize the impact of the change.
- 3. Bargaining:** Attempts to negotiate or delay aspects of change to regain control.
- 4. Depression:** A period of low morale or disengagement; employees may feel helpless.
- 5. Acceptance:** Gradual adaptation and eventual engagement with the new situation.



The Kubler-Ross Change Curve

The Kübler-Ross change curve



Create Alignment

Maximize Communication

Spark Motivation

Develop Capability

Share Knowledge

Psychological Models of Resistance

Lewin's Force Field Analysis

Force Field Analysis was developed by Kurt Lewin in 1951. It is a framework for understanding the dynamics of organizational change. It views any situation as a balance of :-

- **Driving Forces:** Factors promoting change (e.g., market competition, technology, leadership vision)
- **Restraining Forces:** Factors opposing change (e.g., employee resistance, lack of resources, organizational culture).
- **Core Idea:**
 - **Change occurs when driving forces outweigh restraining forces.**
 - **Leaders can either strengthen driving forces or reduce restraining forces to achieve successful change.**



Lewin's Force Field Analysis Process

Step	Practical Tips / Examples
1. Define the Desired Change Clearly	Use measurable objectives, clear scope, and timelines. Example: "Implement a new digital workflow system by Q2."
2. Identify Driving and Restraining Forces	Driving: leadership support, market pressure, technology advantages. Restraining: employee fear, culture, resource constraints. Include individual and organizational factors.
3. Assess the Strength of Each Force	Assign scores (e.g., 1–5) to estimate impact. Use surveys or group discussions. Prioritize high-impact forces.
4. Create Strategies to Reduce Resistance and Increase Support	Restraining forces: provide training, improve communication, offer incentives. Driving forces: highlight benefits, engage change champions, align with organizational vision.
5. Visualize the Force Field (Optional)	Use arrows sized by strength scores. Helps identify which forces to address first and track progress.

Group Discussion

A mid-sized manufacturing company, has just announced a major digital transformation initiative. Over the next 12 months:

- **Production processes will shift to automated systems.**
- **Staff will need to learn new digital tools for planning and communication.**
- **Two small departments will be merged to reduce costs.**
- **Leadership promises long-term benefits but has shared limited details about the transition timeline or training.**

- 1. Form groups of 3–5 students.**
- 2. Discuss and list potential sources of resistance at both:**
 - 1. Individual level**
 - 2. Organizational level**
- 3. Classify each resistance source using Kubler-Ross Change Curve or Lewin's Force Field Analysis concepts.**
- 4. Be ready to share your top 3 resistance factors with the class.**





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Employee Relations Implications of Change

A sound relationship between management and employees is crucial during change processes.

The following considerations should be key during restructuring or transformation:-

- Maintain trust and morale**
- Ensure fair treatment during change**
- Address workload, role changes and reporting lines.**
- Prevent conflict or industrial action**



Employee Relations Implications of Change

Poor ER management can:-

- Increase resistance to change**
- Reduce productivity**
- Decrease employee morale & engagement**
- Increase turnover & talent loss**
- Lead to legal & compliance risk**
- Damage organizational reputation**
- Increase conflict and workplace tension**
- Delay or fail change implementation**



Balancing Organizational Needs and Employee Wellbeing

Change is necessary for competitiveness but must consider employee impact.

Balance can be achieved by:

- Providing training and upskilling**
- Offering flexible work arrangements**
- Engaging employees in decision-making**
- Implementing clear communication strategies**



Communication Strategies To Foster Trust



Nokia's Restructuring Failure Vs. Microsoft's Cultural Transformation

The Role of Poor Communication

In the late 2000s and early 2010s, Nokia—once a global leader in mobile phones—underwent **major restructuring** to respond to competition from Apple and Android devices. However, the change process was plagued by **poor communication practices** that contributed to its decline.

The Result of Successful Communication

In 2014, Satya Nadella became CEO and led a shift to cloud computing. Under Satya Nadella's leadership, Microsoft embraced a **culture of empathy, learning, and collaboration**, replacing its previous competitive, siloed environment. Nadella's **transparent and frequent communication** built **trust** and encouraged employee engagement, making staff feel connected to the company's vision. Combined with a bold pivot to cloud computing, this cultural shift fueled innovation and agility, driving Microsoft's resurgence as one of the world's most valuable companies.



Nokia's Restructuring Failure Vs. Microsoft's Cultural Transformation

Factor	Nokia (Failure)	Microsoft (Success)
Vision & Transparency	Unclear vision; urgency for change not shared.	Clear vision openly communicated by CEO Nadella.
Communication Style	One-way, top-down messaging.	Two-way dialogue via Q&A sessions and feedback.
Leadership Approach	Focused on control; avoided open discussion of problems.	Emphasized empathy, inclusion, and authenticity.
Employee Involvement	Low; little consultation on restructuring.	High; employees engaged in shaping new culture.
Impact on Change	Confusion, fear, disengagement; market share collapsed.	Increased trust, innovation, and agility; market leadership regained.

Building Trust and Credibility

- **Trust is built through consistency, honesty, and empathy:**
 - **Be transparent about the rationale for change**
 - **Share both positive and negative news honestly**
 - **Demonstrate empathy: acknowledge employee concerns, validate emotions**
- **Key traits of credible leadership communication:**
 - **Visibility: Leaders must be present and accessible.**
 - **Authenticity: Avoid “corporate spin”; speak plainly and truthfully**



Communication Techniques

Technique	Description	Purpose / Benefit
Transparent Communication	Share the “why,” “what,” and “how” of change openly.	Reduces uncertainty, prevents rumors, builds trust.
Timely Communication	Deliver updates regularly and at the right moments.	Keeps employees informed and engaged; prevents misinformation.
Empathetic Messaging	Acknowledge concerns, validate emotions, and show understanding.	Builds credibility and emotional support during change.
Two-Way Communication	Provide channels for feedback, Q&A sessions, and discussions.	Encourages employee involvement and ownership of change.
Consistent Messaging	Align messages across leaders, departments, and platforms.	Avoids confusion and reinforces clarity of purpose.
Audience-Specific Communication	Tailor messages for different employee groups.	Ensures relevance and better comprehension.



Case Study – Designing A Communication Plan

- **Divide into small groups (3–5 students).**
- **Refer to your assigned scenario.**
- **Create a brief communication plan including :**
 - **Key Messages:** What do employees need to know?
 - **Audience Segments:** Who needs to hear what? (e.g., leaders, teams, frontline staff).
 - **Communication Channels:** Email, intranet, town halls, team meetings, social platforms.
 - **Timing & Frequency:** How often and when communication will occur.
 - **Feedback Mechanisms:** Ways to gather employee input (e.g., surveys, Q&A).

**Groups spend 15 minutes planning, then 5 minutes presenting to peers.
Peer groups provide quick feedback (1–2 minutes per group).**



THANK YOU!



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