

Conflict Is Inevitable With Persistent Resistance To Change

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Resistance is experienced in most teams as they struggle with the concept of change. The purpose of creating teams is to tackle difficult issues and tough organizational problems. Invariably, the resulting solutions teams develop result in active transformations that disrupt the status quo and personal agendas, which also tends to remove personal positions of power. Consequently, there is a natural tendency for individual team members to resist pending changes.

The main challenge in leading teams is to allow the full complexity of individual personalities, talents, qualities and insights to emerge. These must be actively harnessed in order to achieve major team objectives.

While it is easy to set limits on verbal expressions and behaviors, doing so severely diminishes overall team potential and performance. Since various personality traits of individual members actively shape their general and immediate focus and perspectives, leaders who understand them are able to estimate their direct responses to change. Ultimately, with this related knowledge and understanding, they should be able to anticipate and minimize overall team member resistance. And they should be able to demonstrate that resistance results from differing perspectives that can be reconciled with the objectives of the entire team.

Resistance is an instinctive and energetic opposition to new ideas or someone's expressed wishes to do something differently. If individual team members persist in their resistance, conflict becomes inevitable. Often resistance is framed as a struggle for control or as a problem that has been eliminated. The lines of conflict are often quickly drawn. Therefore, it is important for leaders to understand the concepts of resistance and conflict within their team environments and to learn how to harness and control them.

Avoidance of Conflict

Conflict should not be seen as something to be resolved, but as an experience to be explored. Opposing views in regard to team direction and change are never totally unrelated and can have great value when considered "different parts of the same story." Leaders will often find that resistance and conflict are consistently initiated by many of the same individuals on their teams as a result of their inherent personality traits.

Avoidance of conflict either drains interest, enthusiasm and trust or results in concealed tension, internal fighting and impaired team performance. While some leaders meet resistance head on, others often do everything possible to avoid the attached conflicts. Rather than keep conflicts from erupting, avoidance causes

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increasing internal team resistance. It is extremely important to keep in mind that appeasement in order to diminish conflict is not effective, and instead creates a host of additional challenges to overcome.

Denial of Conflict

When leaders propose change and team members feign agreement, the actual degree of resistance can be immense. This often occurs when teams have strong norms, where dissention and negative views are rarely tolerated and expressed. The core of resistance lies with a particular side of the team or with individual leaders that no one is fully prepared to address or discuss.

While the denial of conflict might be considered a normal process within many team environments, it more often than not builds to the point of erupting into a far more serious problem. Therefore, when active resistance is initially encountered, leaders must ensure that conflicts within their team environments are not denied, but adequately addressed and worked through.

Anxiety

Avoidance and denial of conflict are rooted in personal anxiety. Oftentimes, members can be intimidated by their team environments, their lack of seniority and/or experience, or their own inherent personalities. The concept of change also frightens many people due to associated fears of the unknown and feelings about how change will personally and directly affect them.

It is important for leaders to recognize these factors and the subsequent anxieties that may be created within their team environments. These factors need to be identified and openly and fully discussed. Leaders must address the consequences of allowing anxieties to take root in order to diminish individual fear factors that tend to create undue apprehension, nervousness or panic. Once these issues are addressed and individuals fully understand the root causes and the impact these factors have on their team, personal anxieties will dissolve. When this is accomplished, individual stress levels are reduced.

Addressing the Concept of Change

In team environments there will always be members who desire change and members who wish to keep the status quo. Both of these positions give insight into what members perceive to be the true needs of their team. To ensure that insights are not lost, leaders need to ask themselves the following questions:

- * What is currently happening to and within the team?
- * What force for change is directly impacting the team?
- * Within the team, what counterbalancing forces seek to minimize change?

When leaders are able to identify these factors, both positions are respected, and those who resist change can be viewed as the guardians of the team's traditional norms and beliefs.

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Viewing Resistance as a Strength

Rather than something that must be actively overcome, leaders should be aware that resistance deserves respect for its ability to help teams discover how to change. Since resistance is characterized as a mobilization of energy, leaders must learn how to channel it in positive ways. Resistance should be viewed as a healthy and creative force that can be applied to effectively meet individual challenges. It can be used to frame problems and issues in new ways that all individual team members can appreciate and respect. The team process can be used to work through complex issues, tackle difficult problems and their attached implications and ramifications, and arrive at a consensus in regard to the most workable, practical and effective solutions.

If you would like to learn more about how to effectively communicate your ideas and vision, refer to Improving Communications in the Workplace: Pinpoint Leadership Skill Development Training Series. This training skill-pack features eight key interrelated concepts, each with their own discussion points and training activity. It is ideal as an informal training tool for coaching or personal development. It can also be used as a handbook and guide for group training discussions. [Click here to learn more.](#) [1]

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