

Teaching Note for Chapter 17: Treat Employees as Resources, Not Resisters

General Overview: This chapter helps managers and leaders reconsider their views of employees during organizational change. It introduces three strategies for employees to become more resourceful during organizational change. It also introduces three practices that leaders can use to transform employees from resisters to resources during organizational change. These practices help leaders and managers overcome common stumbling blocks in organizational change based on employee resistance. This chapter can be used during an introduction to management course to teach concepts around leadership and organizational change. This chapter can also be used in a module in a standalone organizational change course that introduces an employee centered (versus change agent centered) view of organizational change.

Core concepts introduced

- Change resistance
- Resourceful behaviors
- Strategies to become more resourceful
 - Cut off the straps
 - Storytelling the Big Picture and Benefits
 - Integrate Self-Affirmation with Doubt
- Practices for transforming employees into resources for change
 - Foster Ownership and Experimentation
 - Focus on the Big Picture and Hidden Benefits
 - Remind Employees of Their Capabilities . . . But Also the Urgency of the Situation

Preparation

- Before or at the beginning of the session, ask students to think about an experience as either a recipient or leader of an organizational change initiative. How did you or leaders in your organization view employees during change? Were employees treated as resisters? How did employees react?

Possible Class Flow

1. Introduction of core concept of change resistance.
2. Discussion of the implications of considering employees as resisters to organizational change. Have students draw from their experience (see preparation) or make predictions about how this can create a self-fulfilling prophecy of change resistance.
3. Introduction of core concept of resourceful behaviors, strategies to be resourceful and practices to transform employees into resources for organizational change.
4. Discussion of which of the three strategies (cut off the straps, focus on the big picture and benefits and integrate self-affirmation with doubt) have students used or experienced. How did they work? If students have not used these strategies before, ask them to think of how they might have helped during a recent organizational change initiative.
5. Exercise: Generating Resourceful Possibilities during Organizational Change exercise (see Appendix)

Supplementary Materials

Conceptual materials for deeper engagement with key ideas:

Research about the dangers of treating employees as resistors to change

Ford, J. D., Ford, L. W., & D'Amelio, A. 2008. Resistance to Change: The Rest of the Story. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(2): 362-377.

Research about “cut off the straps”

Sonenshein, 2013. How Organizations Foster the Creative Use of Resources.” *Academy of Management Journal*.

Research about “Storytell the big picture and benefits”

Sonenshein, S. & Dholakia, U. 2012. Explaining Employee Engagement with Strategic Change Implementation: A Meaning-Making Approach. *Organization Science*, 23(1): 1-23.

Research about “Integrate self-affirmation with doubt”

Sonenshein, S., DeCelles, K and J. Dutton, “It’s Not Easy Being Green: Self-Evaluations and Their Role in Explaining Support of Environmental Issues.” *Academy of Management Journal*.

Integration with Existing Cases

The framework in this chapter is well suited to be paired with any change case in which the focus is on a leader of change or on a team that is requested to do more with less. Two cases that will work particularly well with the ideas in this chapter are:

Erik Peterson (A) (John J. Gabarro, Harvard Business School Case # 494-005)

Peterson faces many challenges typical of a new manager. Students can use the resourceful change framework to analyze how Peterson might have improved his chances of better utilizing his staff to lead change in ways that meet his personal and organizational objectives.

Sabena Belgian World Airlines: Weytjens' First Assignment (Mary M. Crossan and Barbara Pierce, Ivey Case # 9A94M004)

Weytjens struggles with implementing even the simplest changes at his struggling organization. Students can examine how he could use the resourceful change framework to better respond to the challenges he faces with staffing, unions and top management to create a more resourceful organization.

Appendix: Generating Resourceful Possibilities during Organizational Change Exercise

Overview: Have students reflect on a previous experience with organizational change and envision new pathways to successful organizational change by transforming employees from resisters to resources.

Instructions:

Part I

1. Describe three key events during a recent organizational change that did not meet your or your organization’s primary objectives.
2. In the “As a resister . . . “ column, write how you or your organization treated employees as resisters during this key event. This helps document the past.
3. In the “As a resource . . . “ column, write how you or your organization could have instead treated employees as resources during this key event. This helps define future change approaches.

Part II

4. For each of the three key events, complete the desired outcome you were hoping for during this event.
5. For each desired outcome, draw from the strategies to become more resourceful or practices for transforming employees into resources for change to create an action plan that would have helped achieve the desired outcome.

PART I

Key event during organizational change	As a Resister . . . (DOCUMENT THE PAST)	As a Resource . . . (DEFINE THE FUTURE)
1)		
2)		
3)		

PART II

Desired Outcome	Action Plan to Achieve Desired Outcome
1)	
2)	
3)	