

Overcoming Resistance to Change

"In 1789 Ben Franklin wrote to a friend, 'but in this world nothing is certain but death and taxes.' He neglected to mention a third certainty . . . change."
A. Judson

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This article is intended to help you understand the nature of resistance to change in organizations. You will then be better at using the ideas that show you how to overcome resistance in creating the results-focused organization, which we will cover in next month's article.

The truly effective company must be capable of adapting to changing conditions; it must be flexible when appropriate. A company that can make appropriate changes in its procedures, structure, or products, as they are required, is well equipped for the continuing search for effectiveness.

Many enterprises have difficulty in maintaining this necessary flexibility. Good ideas are not always accepted or even recognized, and departmental rivalry sometimes impedes change. Emphasis tends to be on operating well today rather than superbly tomorrow. This situation can be modified, so that productive change can be achieved.

THE FROZEN ORGANIZATION

The frozen organization is input oriented. Its orientation is to the self, rather than to the environment. Using the ideas contained in our two-part series, one may change the frozen organization into an unfrozen one—that is, from an input orientation to an output orientation.

Look back at the decisions that your organization as a whole, or your particular unit, has made in a past period, which could be anything from six months to five years. Then ask the question: "Were the decisions made at the optimum time or were they made too late?"

If you keep finding there has been long delays in decision making, this could indicate a degree of frozenness. A characteristic of the frozen organization is that change is resisted.

Here are some indicators of the frozen organization:

- Beliefs that change is virtually impossible or very unlikely
- Low skills in dealing with change
- Over adherence to past practices
- Clumsy, instant, unannounced change
- Heavy top down authority
- Suppression of conflict
- Frequent operational traumas
- Confidence, trust, candor and a willingness to share information are lacking
- Apparent fear of relearning
- Feelings, probably disguised, of low security
- Low interest in colleague effectiveness
- Poor communication, whether downward, upward or horizontally

THE FLEXIBLE ORGANIZATION

A direct outgrowth of the unfrozen organization is the flexible, output oriented organization.

Obviously one could simply reverse all the indicators of a frozen organization to arrive at the indicators of a flexible organization, but here are a few further ideas.

- Commitment to outputs
- Commitment to improvements
- Appraisal based on outputs and effectiveness
- Relatively high rate of change in systems and rating procedures
- High level of communication
- Enthusiasm for the work
- Willingness to engage new learning experiences
- Good understanding of managing change
- High level of interdepartmental communication
- Good level of critiques with a view to making things work better next time
- High loyalty up and down
- High training and development

budget

- Openness to managerial rotation
- Some new blood regularly appearing
- High generation of new ideas

A flexible organization is one with a range of appropriate responses to a changing environment.

The characteristics of a flexible organization are:

- Emphasis on effectiveness, so that this value is the most important consideration in changes with individuals, units or the organization itself.
- Acceptance of change, so that decisions may be easily implemented at all levels.
- Free power flow, so that decisions are more likely to be made in an appropriate area, not simply where they have been made before.
- Flexible resources allocation, so that people, money and materials are shifted to where they may do the most good.
- Marketing orientation, so that the market defines the organization.
- Technological orientation, so that new technological devices are investigated for their appropriateness.
- Free information flow, so that within limits imposed by the restraints of commercial intelligence, all parts of the organization have a larger frame of reference with which to see their own potential contribution to effectiveness.
- Project teams, so that fresh approaches have a way of being generated.
- Focus on outputs, so that the test of a manager's action is not "what did the manager do?" but "what was produced?" ♦



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