

MANAGING RESISTANCE: IS THERE SUCH A THING AS TOO MANY QUESTIONS?



Also read:

Intro: [Making change happen through managing resistance](#)

Part 1: [Silence isn't always golden](#)

In Part 2 of our series on [Managing Resistance](#), Ellie Pietsch explores how effective change leaders manage questioning as a form of resistance.

Enlisting the support of your team is critical to making change happen. Helping them adapt quickly means they will adopt the new reality more readily.

Speed is of the essence, because every moment they resist change, it means less energy they have to focus on creating the future you have envisioned.

Think of your challenge, as a change leader, as shifting this energy and focus your team is displaying as resistance into something constructive. This can only be done when you can readily anticipate, identify and manage the various types of resistance that may present during your change journey.

In our previous article we explored how to manage [silence](#) as a form of resistance. In this article we'll explore resistance as questioning.

Imagine...

You've identified a need to change to keep pace with competitors that are investing in new technologies, or perhaps the whole industry is being disrupted by external forces.

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In any case, you believe something needs to change. You're not exactly sure what this will mean, but you want your team to be involved in the process. You raise it during an informal conversation in your weekly meeting.

Immediately, you're met with a barrage of specific and detailed questions.

“When is this going to happen?”... “Who will lose their jobs?”... “Who ordered this change?”... “Who will oversee the project?”... “How much will it cost?”... “Why?”... “What authority do we have to do this?”... “Didn't we try this 5 years ago and fail?”

You think...

The immediate and relentless questioning can give the impression that people are on the front foot, attacking your idea. You may feel judged, and that your team is asking these questions to raise obstacles and avoid looking at the problem you've identified.

Your initial response may be to feel discouraged. After all, you were simply trying to engage them in the process and keep them informed. It can be disheartening to face questioning, as though your team has already decided your idea is not going to work.

Consider...

It boils down to your perceptions of resistance. Rightly or wrongly, you can draw the conclusions:

1. Questioning is an attack;
2. Your team is judging you; or
3. They are putting up barriers.

However, the reality may be different. Questions can often be a signal of a deeper curiosity or wanting a plan to succeed by looking at ways it may fail. Consider the following questions:

- ◀ Is your team naturally curious?
- ◀ Are they comfortable chatting with each other and brainstorming solutions?
- ◀ Do they enjoy the opportunity to thrash out a problem together?
- ◀ Have they been involved in other change projects in recent memory?
- ◀ How did these change projects go?

TACTICS

Perhaps this “resistance” is in fact the beginning of robust and rigorous debate that will help you understand the complexity of your change project and contemplate impacts that you weren't aware of.

It can be easy to judge others harshly when you feel under attack from a barrage of questions. However, the wise course of action is to take a beat to reframe your thoughts. This way, you can clear yourself of any knee jerk responses to the questions.

Taking a non-judgemental approach to each question can help your team redirect that initial energy of resistance towards the proposed change and reframe those challenges as obstacles they can help you to overcome.

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There are a number of ways to help you pause in that moment and consider a few behavioural approaches that may help you respond to the questions:

- ◀ If they are driven by curiosity, rather than solution-oriented outcomes, consider revising the way you involve them, breaking it down into digestible pieces. Explain this meeting was to discuss the “big picture” and then only loop them in for changes to each part of the process.
- ◀ If they enjoy solving challenges as a group, setup a forum for in-depth discussion with regular touchpoints to ensure they are involved in each step of the change.
- ◀ If they have been involved in other change projects, consider the success of these. Your team could they actually be excited about the new idea, but just sceptical that this idea might never take off. A tactic for combatting this is to encourage further discussion on why past projects fail to give them confidence these will be addressed in any future change project.

We can help you manage resistance and become a more effective change leader. Get in touch with us regarding the Change Leadership Series.

In our next article we'll consider how Resistance as Stonewalling may show up in your team, and some tactics that will help you address this.

If you'd like to develop your change leadership skills or find out more about managing resistance to change in your team, please contact:

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