

Is resistance hovering close to you like a drone?

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There is a growing fascination with drones. These unmanned aerial vehicles are seemingly taking over the lower levels of our skies, as we watch them serving multiple uses. Some may be dropping supplies into remote communities, while others are beating traffic congestion for emergency assistance. Yet will we always be as fascinated if the purpose of their use changes?

Does the same level of intrigue reign superior when we are leading organisational change? Is resistance to that change just another form of a drone-like entity, hovering out there sometimes serving positively while other times spreading unease through the corridors of our corporate institutions?

Just like drones, resistance is sometimes visible on the surface and other times not; sometimes within our reach and other times not. Is resistance hovering right outside our office door, and we simply close the blinds to it? Could it be time to welcome resistance in?

Resistance can present an opportunity for organisations in two distinct phases of a project – firstly before a change occurs, and secondly during a change implementation.

Before a change occurs

Some resistance can be easily anticipated. A resisting behaviour often shows itself in the workplace personified by its resistor proudly waving a flag.

Take, for example, an employee who has been with a major successful company for many years. That company is renowned for its service and procedural excellence. It has evolved over many years and has inbuilt responsiveness and capability for any new business or customer demands. It holds the greatest market share among its competitors and enjoys a positive reputation. That employee needed a challenge and chose to move to a new company that has limited processes and procedures and leadership that is still finding its way.

While this newly-established company operates in the same core product area, it is surrounded with an entirely different circumstance and also has differing priorities. It simply is a company with its own developing corporate culture. Yet the employee is determined to cut and paste the culture of the original company, thereby always consciously or otherwise interrupting and distorting efforts for the new company to find its feet.

This is to be anticipated. Build in tactics to address this. If the emerging company is now looking to map out operational processes, invite that person to share knowledge of processes. Debrief that from the perspective of where that would or would not support the new vision and desired state of being.

This is one way to involve the resistor while also publicly drawing parameters. Another tactic may involve the person being on a task force to draw out linkages to your own cultural elements at each step of the process.

Wherever possible, anticipate resistance before it shows up, to enable a change process to flow freely.

During a change

Not all resistance can be anticipated. Some is very deep-rooted and may not yet have been triggered in workplace situations.

When a change occurs, it may become apparent that an individual is unable to make the change happen, struggling to work in the new way with new priorities or in a different culture.

Take the employee, who was soon to become a sacrificial lamb, as their behavioural barriers were having a major effect on the change. One last attempt to save this situation was taken by the change manager, and they discovered that the source of the resistance was a washing machine – an amazing source of resistance, but true.

It took time and effort to dig deep to discover, understand and prioritise that distraction, which actually came from the employee's home life. The employee's wife had been made redundant from her previous company, and should that happen to her husband now, a new washing machine would no longer be within her reach. Pressure from home was building up and affecting the employee at work.

Once the source of resistance was discovered, opportunity existed for the managers to ensure the way forward. The company's priority to automation without negative personal implications had to be communicated once again, in a language that suited this employee. The necessity for changed behaviour became the priority .

Often we fight that which is not understood. Resistance, like drones, can both exist in the realm of the unknown. Identify that they are both reality, get to understand them deeply and give the resistance attention and guidance. By bringing both closer to ourselves and aligning them to a positive intent, only productive outcomes will prevail.

Debbie Nicol, the managing director of Dubai-based business en motion, is a consultant working with strategic change, leadership and organisational development. Email her at debbie.nicol@businessenmotion.com for thoughts about your corporate change initiative

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