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BUS 5113 - Unit 5 Assignment

Resistance To Change

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the human behavioral concept of resistance to change. This resistance often creates a roadblock in a team and organizational settings. The paper looks at psychological behavioral reasons for this and various approaches for dealing with resistance. It further discusses how avoidance of complexity contributes to this behavior.

Keywords: *Team Management, Resistance to change, Emotional Intelligence, Organizational Behavior.*

Resistance to Change

Ever since being born, most people tend to prefer an environment where certainty and predictability are predominant. By our own nature, we prefer to avoid change, whether this involves our personal lives or professional ones. As a result, we often put up resistance to change without fully assessing whether this change would be beneficial to us or not. Strelbel (1996) believes that every employee forms what is called a personal compact, that is an understanding, often unspoken and internalized, which defines what is expected from them in order to perform their work duties. A change signifies a departure from their routine, which creates uncertainty and is therefore resisted. In order to properly assess one's resistance to change, we can use an RTC scale, developed by Shaul Oreg (Oreg, 2003), which uses a series of questions in order to assess this resistance among four primary dimensions: Routine Seeking, Emotional Reaction, Short-term Focus, and Cognitive Rigidity.

The first aspect refers to an internal desire for keeping a regular routine and avoidance of unexpected situations. According to the survey, an average person scored 2.71 on a scale of zero to 6, with a standard deviation of 0.9. This indicates that most people are roughly in the middle of this scale, preferring the comfort of a regular routine. A deviation of less than one implies that most people fit within this group and there are few outliers. My personal predisposition to change was scored at 1.61, indicating that I am more of an outlier when it comes to routines and prefers frequent change. I must admit this is not surprising, as I have been consulting for most of my professional career and have not been working with a single client for longer than a year, often staying for three to four months. I attribute this to an internal desire to break a routine. I

believe a frequent change in a routine has significant benefits and allows a person to expand their way of thinking, making it easier to adapt to new situations (Black, 2013).

In a bit of a contrast to the previous measure, I scored above average in Emotional Reaction. This dimension indicates how one reacts to change, whether it causes stress and anxiety, or doesn't produce a significant emotional response. The majority of people are pretty neutral in their emotional reaction, indicated by a mean score of 3.15, either being emotionally balanced or equally reactive to both negative and positive changes. This, however, varies in each organization, depending on internal culture, employees may be more reactive to change, whether in resistance or in the excitement of acceptance to change (Wittig, 2012). I found that my own reaction, scored at 3.5, is accurate. My emotions are often aligned with those of the wider team in a particular situation, indicating that social and peer dynamics play a role in how we react emotionally to change.

Another aspect of how we react to change is the loss of focus, often in the short-term. People usually feel a bit lost and unable to make decisions or perform their functions when reacting to a change. An average score of 2.75 indicates that most people fall somewhere in the middle of this spectrum. I believe this is a normal human reaction, and as I experienced this myself, it is necessary in order to allow time for the change to be fully digested and understood.

In a recent engagement with a consumer goods client, I have run into a situation where a change in direction was introduced in the middle of the process. The client retained me to help them define and adopt a process methodology for their operations team. They had a team of a dozen employees, with various roles and skillsets who were responsible for managing the

company's e-commerce operations. Their typical process involved support operations to make sure websites were up to date with content and product information, as well as the introduction of new functionality, like a product recommendation engine. During my engagement, while I was working on getting everyone up to speed on the new process I have designed for them, the company's management indicated that there was a larger issue with e-commerce operations itself and that the team's process improvement was no longer a priority. I was asked to switch gears and work on the bigger issue. My initial reaction was that of resistance, as I felt that my previous work was not complete and by abandoning it, I would create a bigger problem for the team, than they had prior to me starting. My desire for routine prevented me from immediately switching to the new task, however, that was brief, which is indicative of my score in that category. I realized quickly, that an efficient team process would be irrelevant if the services they manage do not generate value for the company. As a result, I quickly switched the focus to the new task.

The final dimension of resistance to change in the assessment is Cognitive Rigidity. This measure indicates a person's predisposition to frequent change in their own opinion. A high score indicates strong resistance to that. I scored pretty close to the average of 3.87, which means that I typically like to remain consistent in my opinions. I am interpreting this as a positive factor, which indicates that most people often stick to their principals and are not easily swayed by others. While this fact may be counterproductive for organizational change, in my experience it contributed to a more productive decision making process, where subject matter experts can provide their input and not be affected by someone who may have a different opinion, but does not have sufficient experience in that area.

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