



Many companies throughout New Zealand are increasingly puzzled as to why there is such resistance to change in the workplace.

I believe the answer is the **fear that the 'thought of change' evokes** in people.

Change in itself denotes the act or process of substitution, alteration or variation, thereby making something different. For most people this act of difference is threatening because it changes the status quo. Most of us like continuity, sameness and order because it is what we have come to expect. It asks nothing of us other than to be present. With change comes a threat, our perception of output and efficiency is suddenly being questioned and this creates fear. Whatever your position in the workplace, the premise is the same. When change is imminent - fear is present. In order to work with this so that change can be effected it is helpful to consider the following things:

Fear doesn't stop change – it stops our ability to embrace it.
Fear is a shadow that blocks true vision – we cannot see through it.
Fear is ingrained in us; just watch a TV Commercial on smoke alarms.

A lot of our decisions are based on fear. Just look at insurance companies - they bet us that most of what we worry about will never happen. And they win to the tune of millions of dollars per year. **Fear exists in your workplace!** Change or the prospect of change, creates a reaction that usually has fear as its basis. For some team members, the underlying feeling is that it's easier not to embrace change rather than to try, fail, feel rejected and be found wanting.

For instance: when there's a new product to be launched; you approach the team with the exciting news, only to discover that you're not getting the reaction you hoped for. By recognising that they aren't keen, and that its fear based, this gives you a deeper understanding of how to pitch that 'workplace change' to them. What is fundamental to the success of the 'new system' is your understanding that as you peel away that top level of fear underneath are all the other successive layers of fear waiting to be unmasked, like:

Fear of looking incompetent to other colleagues,
Fear of not getting it right,
Fear of being demoted,
Fear of failing financially,
Fear of losing the job,
Fear of letting the family down.

FEAR IS REAL and exists at every level in every organisation!

This is a possible reason why people hold back professionally. All of the perceived fears people have, involve either the past or the future. Simply put – it's either an experience or conditioning they've had or its fear of the unknown.

As A.J.Hackett (the famous Eiffel Tower Bungy Jumper) has said “How can you be scared of something you don’t know about yet?” But people can and they do.
For people to transcend fear, though they must move into a more positive emotional state.

Ways to work with ‘unspoken’ fear and move the resistance:

1. **Infuse** the team with belief and support – make it possible for them to present questions/concerns without patronising them. Remember the ‘change’ is not new to you, you *have thought about it, worked with it, analysed it for some time* before presenting it to them.
2. **Give** attention to resistance presented – It is underpinned by fears they are holding. By treating the most inane resistance with compassion, you create the opportunity for fear to be replaced by acknowledgement that this ‘new idea’ could work.
3. **Reinforce** that though they are doing the best they can – (and you recognise this), the change will make things better for them and the company. Describing concrete examples is helpful at this point.
4. **Make** time for ideas from the team - when they are involved at inception level, they are more likely to feel valued than threatened.

Findings have shown that people in the workplace are sensitive to the emotions that undermine change and that facilitate change. There is need for empathy. Part of the problem, is that leaders expect that change will be incorporated through a written memo or email. This does not work.

The failure to lead by example is ingrained throughout many Companies. People at all levels within the workplace don’t perceive that leading the way is their job, - it belongs to the CEO or the Company director, and therefore the mindset becomes “I won’t do it – it’s not my job”. This situation is not specific to one particular group in the workplace, this occurs throughout industry. It seems that everyone is waiting for somebody else to do it.

This attitude has an effect on the collective group, and makes for a complete inertia when it comes to motivation for change in the workplace. The thinking becomes: why should I? Instead of how can I? The team cannot make changes, where this style of leadership is present. And so we begin to see more clearly why there is such reluctance to not going beyond only doing their job. When change is afoot, there exists a lack of people feeling valued, supported and encouraged.

When planning for change, the following questions are useful to consider:

- ❖ Why is change needed?
- ❖ How involved are the team with this decision?
- ❖ If not why not?
- ❖ Who is going to benefit from this?
- ❖ Who is going to lose from this?
- ❖ How is this change going to be implemented?
- ❖ How is this going to be measured?
- ❖ What tangible results are we expecting?
- ❖ What is there in the way of prime key indicator’s to show the effectiveness of this change?
- ❖ Does workplace change improve the quality of working life? If so how?

For those who haven't experienced success where change is involved - incorporation of the following key ideas could lead to **overcoming the inertia before it really builds**:

- Recognise when team members are struggling and offer support with that, whether it be one on one mentoring, or incentive based rewards.
- Set clear expectations – and make sure what you convey is understood by the team. To be 100% sure have it repeated back to you verbatim, or as an email.
- Provide support for even the most basic of requests. To you it may be nothing; to a non-coping team member it may be overcoming a huge 'fear' of what lies ahead.
- Maintain excellent communication – make time for team members to converse with you. It might be that you allow 5 minutes for each person involved over a one-week period. Make it non-threatening, and use some of the time to acknowledge what that person has already done for and contributed to the company.

And finally, if you instil even some of the ideas mentioned in this article, you are less likely to experience resistance when it comes to introducing change at your place of work. Of interest, the biggest issue in any workplace is that Management do not listen! By allowing team members the opportunity to talk to you, you alleviate some of the anxiety that is present. If you work on the premise, that all they want is to be heard, you are making headway in ameliorating the concerns presented. Change is only as effective as the person who is communicating it to others!

For more on this topic, and some further ideas to address this issue - see the Workshop

outlines and resources we provide, listed below.

For the individuals needing to adapt to change

Workshops and/or Coaching sessions on:

1. Managing Change
2. Motivation Building
3. Building Confidence at Work
4. Personal Accountability
5. Vision and Goal Setting

For the Managers wanting effective change in the workplace

Change Management Workshop

- Communication Skills (Leading Teams towards Change)

- Vision and Goal Setting (Establishing Mind-Set Excellence)

- Motivating (The Team - Moving fear into success)

Consultations

Consulting Session (Groups of Managers/Leaders) dealing with specific/individualised issues on Change Management Reactions and Attitudes.

Consulting Session (one on one) with Managers/Leaders targeting specific concerns regarding Change Management Reactions and Attitudes.

Please contact us if you would like information on any of the above.