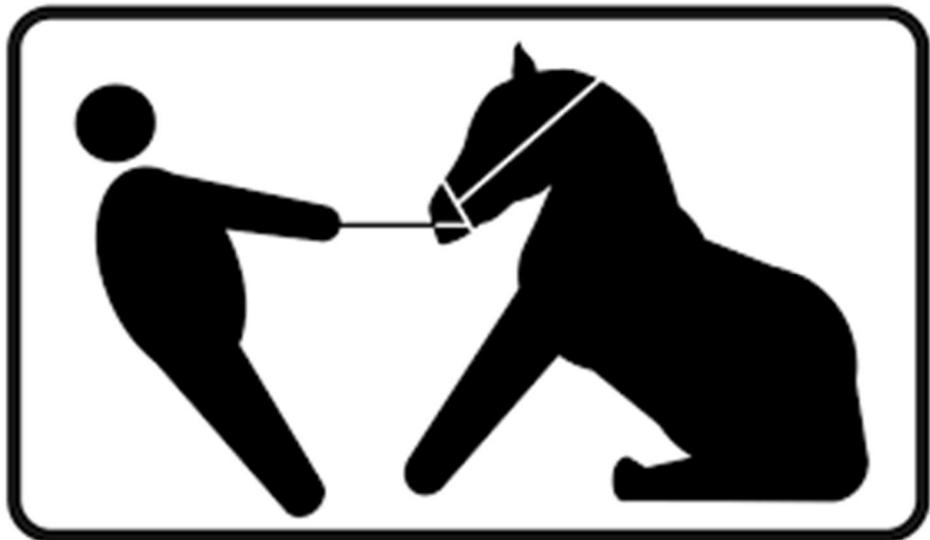


Reader Resistance

I resist, therefore, I am

Dealing with resistance in education



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1. What is resistance?

1.1. General

Resistance is a complex concept. It may refer to physics (e.g. electrical resistance, friction, ...), medicine (e.g. antibiotics resistance), politics and military (e.g. opposing a foreign occupation) and even other fields. In this guide we look at resistance as the refusal to accept or comply with something; the attempt to prevent something by action or argument. In education, resistance mostly has to do with change. Resistance to change is the act of opposing or struggling with modifications or transformations that alter the status quo in the workplace.



Figure 1 Variety of meanings of resistance

Task:

1. Why do people you work with resist?
2. How can you see people you work with resist?

1.2. Resistance is healthy

Every resistance has its positive intention.

Resistance is often looked at as a negative behaviour. However, when a group of nationals oppose foreign occupation (e.g. French resistance during Nazi occupation) resistance is perceived as a positive action. All of us want to boost our immune system in winter so as to have resistance against germs. Resistance can be essential in surviving!

Resistance can be positive. The best way of dealing with resistance is to look at it from a positive perspective. People who resist show they care about the change, which is starting point for interaction. It is stronger than indifference. It is a matter of finding the reasons for the resistance.

2. Why do people resist?

People resist because they feel threatened. Resisting is protecting against loss and pain.

People who resist are trying to protect their needs (stability, safety, job, salary, ...), their interests (respect, esteem, ...) and their input and contribution (action, motivation, ...).

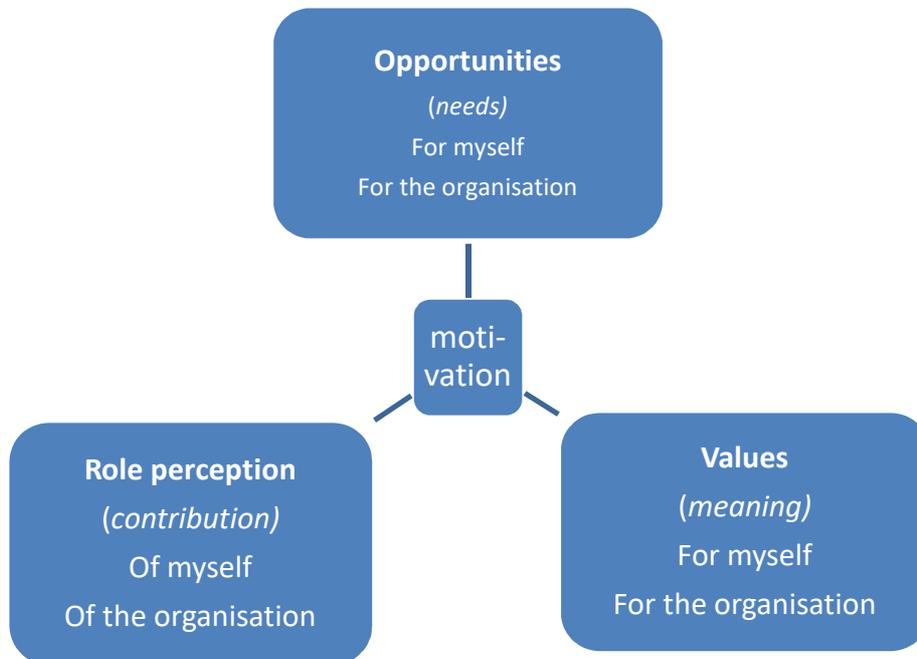


Figure 2 reasons for resistance

When educational change is implemented, resistance can help the organisation to double check the intended outcomes, to renew rationale and purposes. Resistance can make one aware of the vulnerable spot.

The best way of dealing with resistance is to first:

- accept the fact that there will be resistance
- take time to understand the reasons for resistance
- improve the communication

and only then start acting.



2.1. Reasons for resistance

2.1.1. Increase of work load



"IMPLEMENTING THESE CHANGES WON'T BE EASY.
 WE'RE PRETTY SET IN DOING THINGS THE WRONG WAY."

Change initiatives sometimes lead to fragmentation instead of integration. New initiatives are put in place without removing some ballast from the past. This will lead to the increase of work load. People feel their current routines might have to change and that will be perceived as more work. Obviously, change comes with more work at first, as new routines need to be developed. However, it is important for change agents to weed the garden (removing ballast from the past), before implementing new things.

<https://www.cartoonstock.com/directory/c/change.asp>

2.1.2. Threats to professional identity

Educational change is challenging one's beliefs about the job. "Have I been doing this wrong all this time?" is a painful thought which one wants to avoid.

Engaging in new initiatives creates a feeling of (temporary) incompetence. Since the initiative is new, one has no expertise yet and hence people feel they have to jump in the deep end. "I cannot lose face in front of my learners or colleagues" is big reason for avoiding any change.

2.1.3. Loss of status and influence

When dealing with change, people want to know whether they can stay who they are (their identity). They also check whether the people who start change have the right to speak. "Are these people telling me how I should do my job?" Power balances or the perception of those balances influence the level of resistance.

An example:

The implementation of PLCs in South African schools should create a change in school culture. Teachers are supposed to take ownership of their own learning and hence take a leadership role in their field of expertise. Traditional management structures might feel threatened by such approach as they feel they will lose power, which can be a reason for resistance.

"And it ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, then to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under new".

The Prince, N. Machiavelli, 1515

2.1.4. Moral integrity

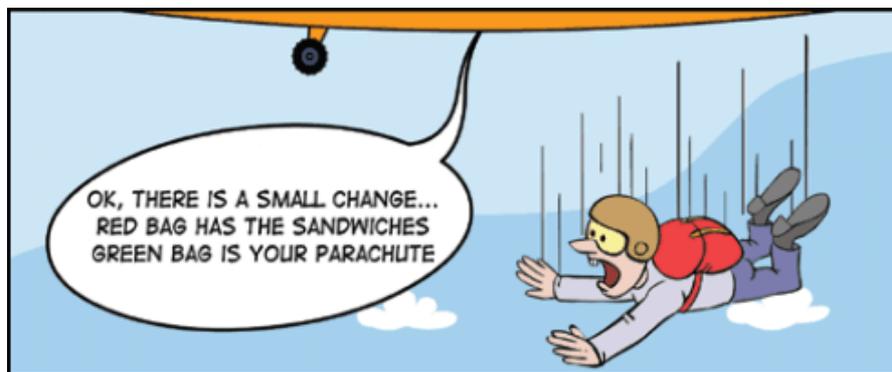
Resistance to change might also be caused by the moral integrity of the person resisting. This person might have a strong feeling that the intended change is not in the interest of the learners that it might damage the quality of the work.

This proves that change leaders should always explore reasons of resistance as this might expose loopholes or even mistakes in the change strategy.

2.1.5. Ambiguous communication

In many change processes the people who will actually have to implement the change are underrepresented in the decision-making process. This means that there is lack of ownership or buy in. This triggers questions as “What are they up to this time?”

Apart from that, the communication about the change, the intended outcomes and the possible routes for action is limited or even completely missing. This triggers questions as “How does this affect me?” On top of that, change agents sometimes seem only to talk about change, but not live the change themselves. This makes people say: “Look at what they do, but they said...”



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2.1.6. Mental models

Sometimes one thinks that communication was clear, and yet implementation is low. This might be caused to the different mental models people have. The same information and reality is perceived differently because of a different model. What is the professional frame of reference? What is the subjective theory about quality education? What are the visions about the world? What educational (and other) traditions are in place?

Answers on these questions will help the change team to avoid resistance as they will have a better understanding about how to turn around the situation.

An example:

An intervention wants to stimulate the use of manipulatives and learner centred activities in math teaching. This initiative is likely to fail if change agents don't interact with teachers about their mental models. What do they perceive as quality teaching and learning? If they are convinced that the teachers should be teaching and the learners should be sitting dead quiet, the intervention will cause frustration as there is a clash in beliefs. This needs to be dealt with first before teachers can change their approaches.

Another example:

An official decides not to follow advice received from a colleague. Not because the advice is not sound, but because it was given by someone who is younger than him or because it was given by a female. The official thinks: "I cannot follow advice that was given by a female."

2.1.7. Conditions for implementation are not met

Resistance can also be caused by the fact that conditions for implementation are not met. The necessary infrastructure or resources are not in place. The change was poorly prepared. The human capacity is not available. The school climate is not conducive. An aspect that plays a very big role is the sequence of leadership: if the sequence is interrupted, the creation of a climate of change will be prohibited.

An example:

The implementation of PLCs in South African schools, implies that teachers take ownership of their own professional development. But to succeed, one needs a conducive and supportive environment. The SMT is supposed to actively engage with teachers on their gains from the PLC ("can you show what you have changed in your class practice?"), to award progress, to encourage participation (even during the IQMS talk). If these conditions are not in place, teachers won't feel encouraged to establish their PLCs.

However, "conditions are not in place" can be used as an excuse. "We don't have resources" is an easy way not to really engage with change. It is important to find out what real reasons for resistance are.

2.2. Resistance is primarily emotional

Resistance is primarily an emotional process but often disguised with rational arguments. This also means that you cannot overcome it by refuting the rational arguments. It will lead to "yes, but..." reactions.

"Resistance is a mourning process".
Kloosterboer, 2005

Resistance is often an expression of:

- Denial: "This will never materialise anyway."
- Anger: "You are telling me we have been doing this wrong all the time?"
- Depression: "I'll just wait and see what happens."
- Resignation: "It can't go on like this."

2.3. Resistance and the iceberg

People resisting are showing certain behaviour. However, the biggest reasons are under water. One needs to actively explore those to be able to overcome the resistance.

The components of the iceberg are:

- Psychological reasons: personal perception.
There might be a huge difference in perception of change between the change agent and the target of change.

- Psycho-social reasons: roles and rules in the group.
Each member plays a different role in a group (Team role theory, Belbin).
- Psycho-dynamic reasons: interpersonal behaviour
Relations between people are often a matter of cause and effect, action and reaction.
(Interpersonal circumplex, Leary)

These aspects will be further explored in this Guide.

3. How do people resist?

People have different ways to show resistance. Resistance can be visible and invisible; it can be active (doing something) or passive (not doing anything). In the figure below examples are given of each combination of those parameters.

Active and visible	Active and invisible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To discuss • To delay (yes, but, no...) • External attribution • Black-white thinking: past/now, they/us, ... • Asking for details* • To defy, be cynical • Attack • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sabotage • Hidden agendas • Denied information • Wrong information • Ritual behaviour, act as if. •
Passive and visible	Passive and invisible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absenteeism • Ignore the change • Sit on the fence • ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submarine (stay quiet, hide) • Follow without commitment • Lip-service • Pretend to agree • Grieving/mourning • Avoiding • ...

Figure 3 Examples of resistance; *Asking for details can be both constructive (questioning, reasoning...) as destructive (cynicism, attack) behaviour.

Task

1. Which examples of resistance have you seen in action?
2. Which examples of resistance have you exhibited yourself?
Which resisting behaviour is your favourite to exhibit?

Task

1. When do you resist?
2. Share with your partner
3. Think of a possible way to deal with the resistance of your partner
4. As soon as your solution is mentioned during the coming presentation: raise your hand and wave

4. How to deal with resistance?

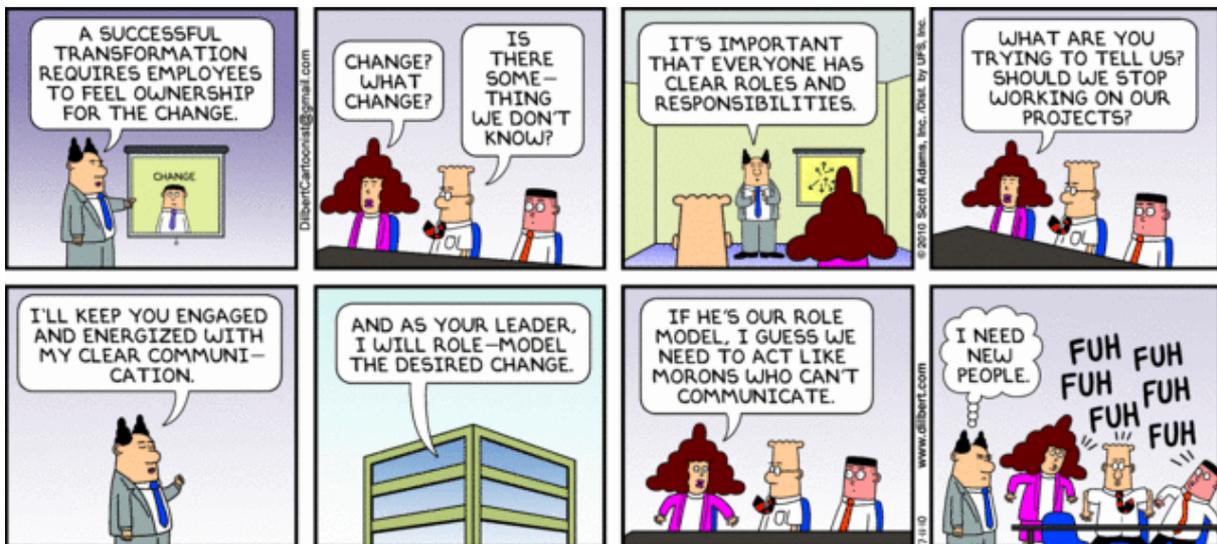
4.1. Creating the best conditions for change

The best way to avoid resistance or deal with resistance is by creating conditions that enhance the educational change. Below we will highlight the most important ones.

4.1.1. Safe environment

People are most likely to implement new and challenging changes if the environment in which they have to do so is safe.

- Building trust is key.
- Treat people as partners, not as opponents.
- Encourage experiments and tolerate errors. Making mistakes is fine.
- Walk the talk: live and practice what you are preaching.



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4.1.2. Create shared meaning

Change will work better if all have a shared meaning about the intended outcomes and reasons. Creating a vision and mission which is really understood is important. This is what is called a “common cause”.

- Provide a sense of direction
- Engage in joint reflections:
 - Make knowledge and beliefs explicit
 - Look at practice in view of beliefs (and vice versa)

4.1.3. Create ownership

By creating a shared meaning participants will also start owning the change. Once people feel it is “our” project, they will go for it.

- Promote participation: Accept individual deciding/responsibility. This will imply changes in leadership style: allow shared leadership. People who actively engage should feel free to show confidence.

- Let people design and implement, try out and reflect. Don't push a blue print.
- Give mandates to role players.
- Ask for support and suggestions
- People want to see impact: find ways to measure (even small initial) changes and celebrate.



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4.1.4. Create success experiences

Create opportunities for quick wins as a way of creating motivation for the tougher long term objectives. Every step forward should be recognised and celebrated.

4.1.5. Support and coaching

Investing in good relations is key in avoiding resistance. A good relation is the basis for coaching and support:

- Be confident and build confidence
- Be an active listener
- Ask for help or a mediator
- Don't force people to accept your help.

4.2. Showing importance and benefits

For people to engage in innovations and change without resistance, they need to know why the change is important.

- It is important to show that the intended change meets the real needs.
- Explain a view of the desired future: what would we like to achieve, in due course? Where are we going? Remember to align this with the current beliefs of the participants (see above).
- Create awareness of gap between present and envisaged future.
- Give all reasons for the change. Give arguments, preferably evidence based. Reports of test results, NEEDU reports, statistics,
- Show effects, show advantage for learners; give evidence. Bring in results of action research, testimonies, ...

4.3. Allow for diversity

Just as learners learn in varied ways and teachers should cater for that diversity, change agents need to make sure they allow diversity in educational change.

- Blue prints for change don't work. There is no one size fits all

- People change and learn in a different pace. Some will be quicker, others slower.
- A critical attitude can add value. Acknowledge relevant critique.
- Recognise and accept resistance

4.3.1. Roles in the group

Meredith Belbin, in his Team Role Theory, says the success of teams depends on the behaviour of its members. There are separate clusters of behaviour which are called Team Roles.

- Task centred roles:
 - Initiators
 - Informants
 - Coordinators
 - Team workers:
 - Coffee providers
 - Conflict solvers
 - ...

A highly effective team has a good balance between the different roles.

There are also anti-team roles:

- Anti-team roles:
 - Dominant people
 - Problem finders
 - Trouble makers,...

Recognising the fact that no one in the team must be the same, that all have a valuable role to play, is important for success.

4.3.2. Attitudes towards change

Research (Rogers & Moore) about change and diffusion of innovations shows that the attitude of people towards innovation differs.

Some people come up with a great idea (re-newers). Others might not have the innovative ideas, but are quick in seeing potential and they can lead the change (leaders). Some people will happily jump on the change wagon (early birds). Others will need lots of convincing (late followers). A small minority tends to reject (slow pokes/rejecters). A few will never join.

Understanding that each community/group has these dynamics helps a change agent not to get frustrated by what is perceived as a negative attitude. It is a normal process.

An average group has:

- 3% Re-newers
- 14% Leaders
- 34% Early birds
- 34% Late followers
- 16% Rejecters, slow pokes
- 2-3 % never joins

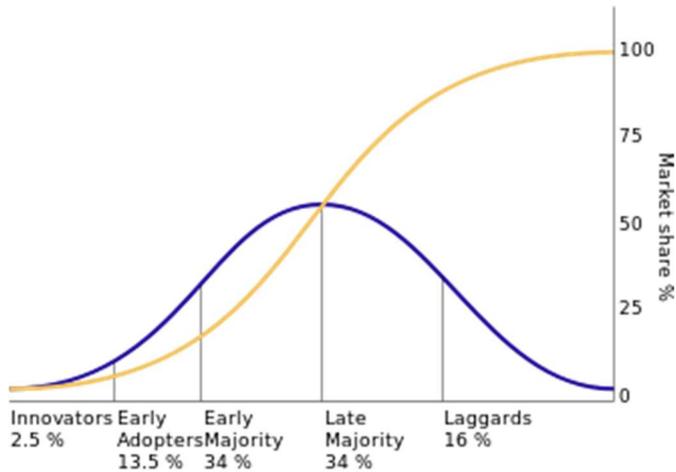


Figure 4 Diffusion of innovation (Rogers & Moore) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diffusion_of_innovations)

A change agent better focuses on the mass and doesn't waste time and energy by attending to the 2-3% that might never join. If necessary, selective pressure need to be used to get the group of rejecters on board (see later).

4.3.3. Complementary and symmetry behaviour

Research by Leary (Interpersonal circumplex) showed that certain behaviour elicits a different behaviour. These are called behavioural interaction patterns. This research led to a model that can help to explain behaviour in groups. This can help to explain resistance.

The circumplex has 2 axes:

1. Dominance (above behaviour) versus submission (below behaviour): exerting lots of influence versus not exerting influence at all
2. Hostile (opposed behaviour) versus affiliation (together behaviour): non acceptance versus acceptance

Two main types of patterns can be identified: symmetry patterns and patterns of complementarity.

- Symmetry means that hostility provokes hostility, togetherness attracts togetherness
- Complementary means that dominance provokes submissiveness and submissiveness provokes dominance.

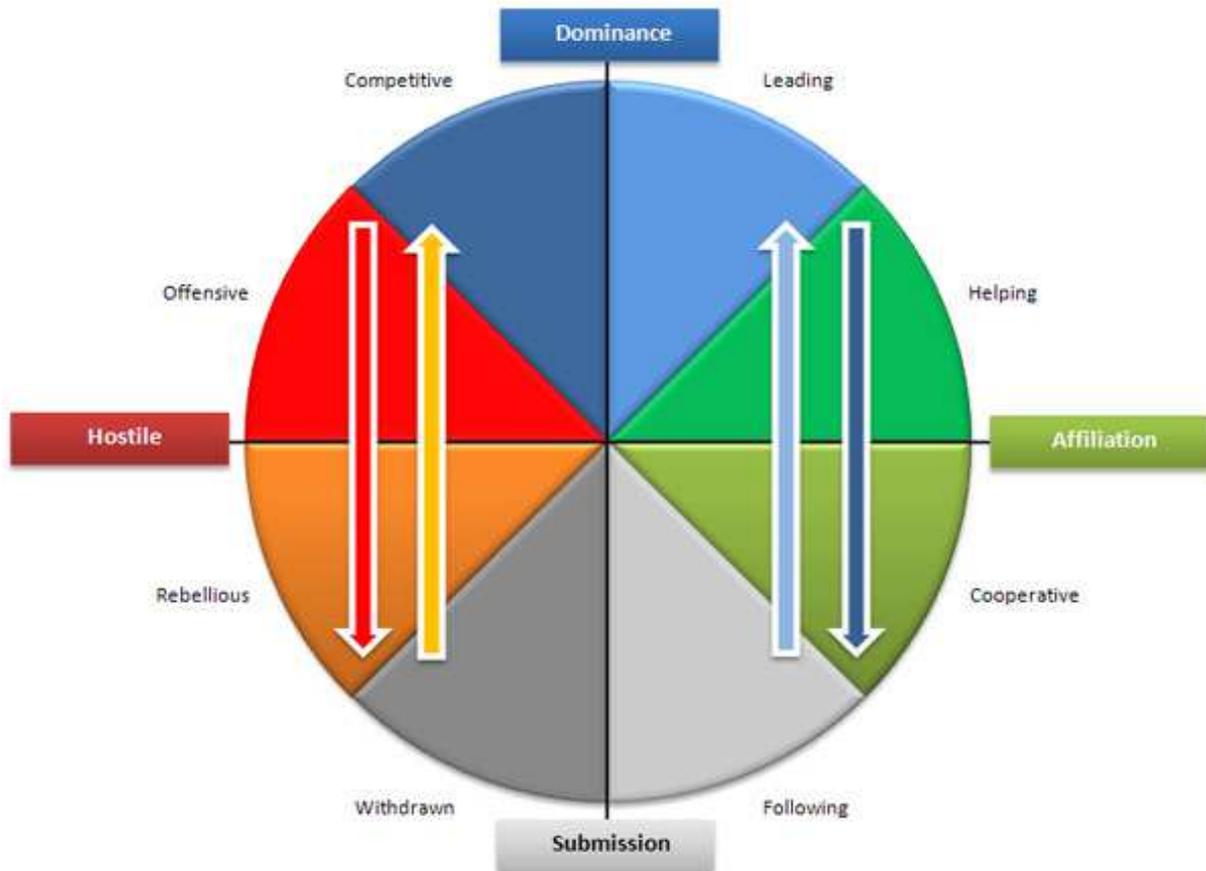


Figure 5 Interpersonal circumplex (<http://www.van-haaften.nl/communication/rose-of-leary>)

Task

1. Does Leary's diagram make sense to you?
2. Can you give practical examples of its use? Have you seen it in practice?

In conclusion, behaviour triggers behaviour (action/reaction; cause/effect). Collaboration can be improved by consciously choosing the right position in the Interpersonal circumplex. Influencing one another begins with changing your own behaviour.

Some examples:

If you want someone to be more leading, be more submissive yourself.

If others are too retreating (withdrawn), be more helping

If you are hostile, you will meet hostility. Deliberately chose affiliation.

In short: different people might need different approaches.

4.3.4. Selective pressure

If necessary, negotiate separately with a selected group which shows resistance or with certain people within a group which shows resistance. Discuss the consequences if certain action is not undertaken. Don't forget to tell what you will do, but also do as you tell.

4.4. Communicate efficiently

It is clear that communication is a key to success in any change process. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Listen actively, instead of convincing people
- Be interested in arguments
- Reformulate positively
- Be brief and clear
- Present in a convincing way
- Adjust to the audience
- Repeat over and over
- Define expectations
- Report frequently
- Walk the talk

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“What if, and I know this sounds kooky, we communicated with the employees.”

4.5. Other prevention techniques

People want to feel competent, and to be considered so. People want to decide autonomously between the limits of consented vision. A successful change agent takes this into consideration. Keeping good relations, is key to success and avoids resistance.

A change agent should be aware of his/her non-verbal communication which should be aligned with the message that is put across via verbal communication.

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