



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Understanding Resistance

A change that causes a move from a comfort zone into the unknown is often met with resistance. Resistance is a force that slows or stops movement. In fact, resistance hinders change, often leading to arguments, opposition and threats. It is therefore not surprising that nearly two-thirds of all major changes in organizations fail.

Levels of resistance

There are three levels of resistance.

- Level 1 - Information stage

Resistance at this stage comes from lack of information, disagreement with the idea itself, lack of exposure, and confusion.

- Level 2 - Reactions to change

At this stage, emotional and physiological reactions to change prevail. Blood pressure rises, adrenaline flows, pulse increases and the employee is fearful that he or she will lose face, friends or his/her job.

Resistance may come from fear over a perceived loss of power, control, status or respect, a feeling of incompetence or isolation, or a sense among employees that they can't take on anything else (too much change).

- Level 3 - Bigger than the current change

This is the domain of cultural, religious and racial differences. In other words, people may not resist the idea itself, but what you represent or because of their relationship with you. They often wonder why the other group can't see reality as it is.

Resistance at this level may come from a personal history of mistrust, significant disagreements over values, or transference (the person being resisted represents someone else such as a mother or father or some significant member).