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Overview › Culture › **Change Management**

[Kotter, John P.](#); [Schlesinger, Leonard A.](#) (1979)

Choosing strategies for change

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Review by: [Seufert, Sabine](#) (2005-04-19)

In 1979 the authors already stated that “in a rapidly changing world managers need to increase their skills at diagnosing resistance to change and at choosing the appropriate methods for overcoming it.” They observed that most companies have to pursue organisational changes at least once a year and major changes every four and five. One can estimate whether managers face today an accelerated rate of change.

Firstly, the authors describe four basic reasons why people resist change for the diagnosis phase:

- Parochial self-interest: people think they will lose something due to the changes
- Misunderstanding and lack of trust
- Different assessments: managers assess the situation differently because they don't have all relevant or wrong information
- Low tolerance for change: people are limited in their ability to change

Secondly, the article gives a well written description of various methods for dealing with the resistance and discuss in each case the pros and cons:

- Education and communication: one of the most common ways, in terms of timing the best is to initiate the interventions beforehand.
- Participation and involvement, when the initiators do not have all the information they need to design the change, but the approach can be quite time-consuming.
- Facilitation and support in terms of being supportive as managers.
- Negotiation and agreement offering incentives to active or potential resisters, especially appropriate for people who lose something due to the changes.
- Manipulation and co-optation, especially if change managers have no other alternatives and not enough time

- to educate, involve, or support people, and no resources to negotiate, coerce, or co-opt potential resistors.
- Explicit and implicit coercion where speed is crucial and the change managers have enough power.

Thirdly, the authors analyse the relevant factors influencing the choice of implementation strategy by the responsible managers. According to their studies four situational factors are determining:

1. The amount and kind of resistance the managers assume beforehand.
2. The position and power influence of the initiator.
3. The person (and his/ her personality) responsible for designing and implementing the change
4. The stakes involved (e. g. the presence or lack of presence of a crisis, the consequences of resistance)

Fourthly, the authors come up with four main steps how managers can improve the success of change endeavours as a kind of conclusion:

1. Conducting an organizational analysis about the current situation, problems, etc.
2. Conducting an analysis of factors focusing on the diagnosis of potential resistors and their motives
3. Selecting a change strategy based on the previous analysis by choosing appropriate methods for dealing with resistance.
4. Monitoring the implementation.

Insofar the authors provide a guide for successfully implementing changes to what kinds of approaches will work when the different types of resistance occur. The article is easily readable and many striking examples point up realistic scenarios. In terms of scientific rigor the research methodology doesn't come clear. The authors just give the limited explanation that the described methods are based on empirical analyses of dozens of successful and unsuccessful changes. Overall, the fascinating aspect of this article is the long-lasting value. Even though the authors wrote the article over 20 years ago, the described reasons of resistance and methods for dealing with them are still of high importance and of convincing validity.
