

CHANGE REACTION CHANGE REACTION CHANGE



CHANGE REACTION

understanding your response to organizational change

Theoretical Background

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An Excerpt from the Facilitator Guide

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Organizational change is happening all the time. Responses to organizational change vary widely among people. When change happens, each person responds in a particular way, whether or not he or she is aware of it.

Awareness of one's own reactions to change is the first step in dealing with any organizational change. Once an individual is aware of his or her typical reactions to change, he or she may then make a conscious effort to use functional behaviors that help him or her adapt to it. *Change Reaction* helps individuals become aware of their typical reaction to organizational change and identify ways to manage it effectively.

THE *CHANGE REACTION* MODEL

The *Change Reaction* Model (figure 4) shows the three categories of responses to organizational change. Research indicates that organizations are in a continuous state of change and that some type of resistance is inevitable. No matter what type of reaction a person has, there is always *motion* in response to change:

- ▶ Some people have a natural tendency to *move toward* or support change.
- ▶ Others are noncommittal and typically *move away from* change.
- ▶ Still others typically *move against* change by resisting it and creating resistance to change in others.

What happens inside individuals in the face of change is a shift of energy. If the change is threatening, energy flows in a negative, resistant direction. Some people neutralize their energy when faced with change. Other people see the potential benefits of change, and their energy moves in a positive, supportive direction. These three broad sets of behaviors are not mutually exclusive — a person may display any combination of responses to a given organizational change effort.

It is important to note that not all resistance to change is negative. When people act to make the change work better or improve it, then such “resistance” is in the service of effectiveness.

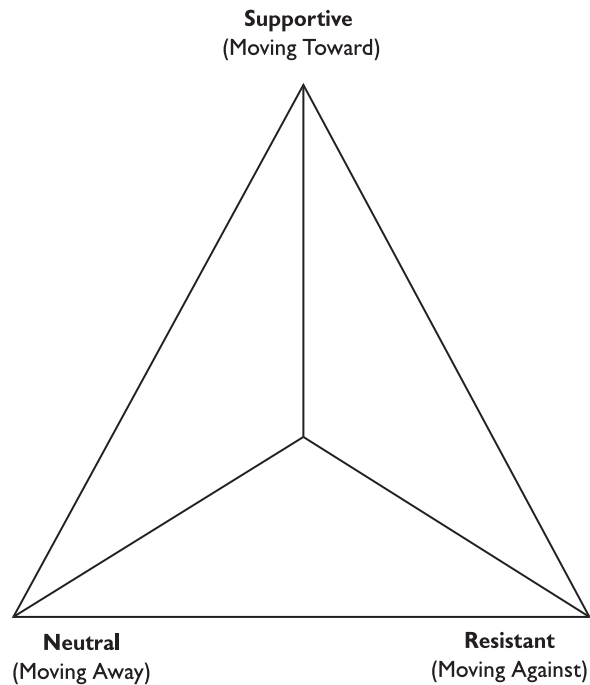


Figure 4. *Change Reaction Model*

Change Reaction Categories

It is useful to consider that the ways in which people behave with regard to change can be classified into three categories. Of course, these categories are somewhat arbitrary, but they help us to make choices about how we can maximize the effectiveness of change efforts. The three categories are: Supportive, Neutral, and Resistant.

Supportive

The first category consists of behaviors that support transformational processes in organizations. The behaviors include:

- ▶ **Making change happen.** This is the behavior that is most supportive of innovation. People who strive to implement change take personal responsibility for initiating improvements.
- ▶ **Anticipating the need for change.** People who keep the future in mind also look at the possible effects of environmental change on the system. They are sensitive to the need for innovation inside the organization.
- ▶ **Problem solving.** This response to organizational change consists of using systematic techniques to make decisions about procedural modifications. The person who is oriented to this behavior looks for ways to make change work.

- ▶ **Assessing one's own reactions and feelings.** This response answers the questions, “What’s in it for me?” and “How will the change affect me?” For people to feel committed to changes in organizational life, they must make a personal connection to them.

These four sets of behaviors constitute supportive responses to change. When people demonstrate these behaviors, they are seen as proactive, positive, assertive, and productive. People who consistently engage in these responses actively support change. They immerse themselves in organizational improvements and innovation. In other words, they are *moving toward* change.

The items that measure Supportive behaviors are:

1. Try to find out how it might affect me.
4. Ask, “What’s in it for me?”
7. Initiate changes that I believe are needed.
10. Try to “stay two steps ahead” in expectation of the next changes that might occur.
13. Am comfortable leading the change.
16. Look for barriers that stand in the way of implementing it.
19. Look for solutions to problems created by the change.
22. Attempt to anticipate the need for it.

Neutral

These four sets of behaviors neither support nor resist organizational change. The responses are:

- ▶ **Agreement without commitment.** People who adopt this stance go along with changes rather than giving their full support. Verbal endorsement is not matched by supportive behavior.
- ▶ **Fence sitting.** This behavior consists of not taking a stand on changes. People who are either indecisive or unwilling to commit themselves tend to avoid “going public” with their viewpoints about organizational change.
- ▶ **Withholding support.** This response is indicative of people who are slightly less supportive of change than the “fence sitter.” Here the person does not work against change but is vocal about not supporting it.
- ▶ **Moaning and groaning.** Complaining about organizational change may be cathartic, but it does not help in making the change happen. People who habitually participate in gripe sessions about system reforms, and make no progress toward implementing the change, are unproductive.

This category of responses is labeled Neutral. When people demonstrate these behaviors, they are seen as being inactive, nonfunctional, submissive, and unproductive. People who engage in these types of activities are neither supportive of organizational improvements, nor are they significantly resistant to them. In other words, they are *moving away from* change.

Items that measure Neutral behaviors are:

2. Don't get significantly involved.
5. Keep my opinions to myself.
8. Take an impartial position.
11. Show little support.
14. Just go along with it.
17. Follow rather than lead.
20. Complain about it.
23. Participate in gripe sessions about it.

Resistant

The third type of response to change involves active resistance. The behaviors are:

- ▶ **Blaming and finger pointing.** People who are opposed to a change typically find ways to find fault with the change and those implementing it. They blame or point fingers at others instead of taking responsibility for their own feelings and reactions. People who engage in this behavior are working against organizational renewal.
- ▶ **Blocking the change implementation.** There are two ways:
 - ▷ **Passive resistance** — Here the person is covert in attempting to block change. The person also denies any responsibility for the change or for his or her unproductive behavior.
 - ▷ **Overt resistance** — People who actively resist change in organizations are sometimes open about it. Here the person publicly protests against modifications. This behavior may include defiance.
- ▶ **Attempting sabotage.** The most dysfunctional response to change is to undermine it. Resistance goes underground and becomes destructive. People who disagree with change sometimes want it to fail so that they can say they were right.

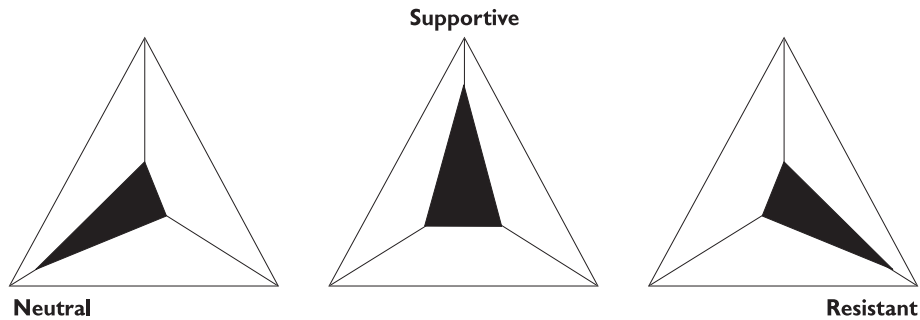
This final category is Resistant. When people demonstrate these behaviors, they are seen as being negative, aggressive, and counter-productive. People who resist change often engage in covert activities. In other words, they are *moving against* the change.

The items that measure Resistant behaviors are:

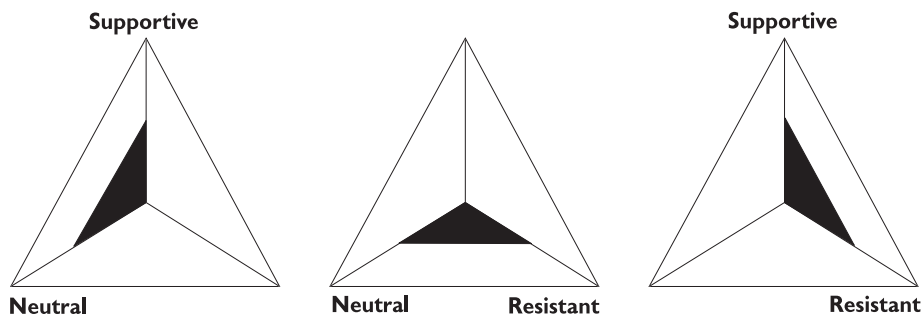
3. Am not open with my dissent.
6. Look for scapegoats when it troubles me.
9. Sabotage the changes that I believe are misguided.
12. Blame others for my trouble with it.
15. Actively work against the changes with which I disagree.
18. React with passive resistance.
21. Openly resist it.
24. Undermine the changes with which I disagree.

Change Reaction Profiles

The three profiles below depict three different responses to organizational change. The graphics represent a person who embraces innovation in a supportive manner, one whose responses are neutral, and one who reacts with resistance.



The next three profiles show patterns of behavior that include two sets of responses. The first depicts a person who is either supportive or neutral to organizational change. The second graphic illustrates a pattern of behavior that is unsupportive of innovation — either neutral or resistant. The third indicates that the person may feel polarized in response to change — either actively supporting or resisting the change.



The final sample profile shows a person who engages in all three types of responses to approximately the same degree. An indecisive or impulsive person can exhibit this pattern. Of course, this person may carefully discriminate among changes and choose responses accordingly.



ABOUT HRDQ

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