

Change for the Better

Any change initiative will have proponents and opponents. That's the good news. A change initiative without skeptics is probably one that hasn't really been paid attention to yet. It can be a sign that people are waiting for the enthusiasm to blow over so they can get back to business as usual. Preparation for change includes generating enthusiasm for the change process by working with the early adopters and converts, but it also includes working diligently with skeptics to verify the initiative and win support.

Thinking about a change initiative and preparing to respond to the issues that might arise will help you to address concerns in a timely manner. In the initial stages, it can be useful to test your ideas with devil's advocates, and finally with genuine nay-sayers.

Change is more generally met with enthusiasm when

- we propose any change that will affect us ourselves
- we are involved in the design of the change
- we feel that our opinion and views are heard
- when we see how our ideas have contributed to the vision and implementation
- we benefit from the change
- the organization benefits from the change
- the students benefit from the change
- the wider community benefits from the change
- we dislike the status quo
- we are confident about our competence in the new model
- we trust/respect/like the person/group, proposing the change
- we can see the big picture (provided we support it) and how the change contributes to it
- we are given support and time to adjust to the changes
- we are not expected to change too many things at the same time
- change is paced in a way that respects our work load and personal life
- we understand the reasons for the change
- we believe the change is important to something or someone we value
- we believe the change is necessary

Change in education is met with resistance when

- we are not involved in the change design
- we feel that our opinion/views are not considered
- we do not see benefits for ourselves, arising from the change

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- we do not feel the University would benefit from the change
- we do not feel the students would benefit from the change
- we do not feel the wider community would benefit from the change
- we like the present status quo
- we lack confidence about our competence, or others' competence in the new context
- we do not trust/do not respect/do not like the person/group, proposing the change
- we can not see the big picture and how the change would contribute to it
- we are not given support and time to adjust to the changes
- we are expected to change too many things at the same time
- change is not carried through properly
- we do not understand the reasons for the change
- there is no clarity about change aims and objectives
- we believe other things need changing more urgently
- we believe the time is not right for this particular change
- the degree of change is too great to be readily assimilated
- we are afraid of losing what's important to us

You can use the preceding list to refine your change strategy. Ask yourself, "Have we addressed this? How? Is there anything else we can do?"

In addition to this work, it's important to address resistance early and often. Ask people to come forward about their reservations. Early on, it's essential to not resist the resistance that is based on realistic concerns. Welcome it, integrate people's thinking about how to do things differently, and broadcast how you integrated the ideas. This will provide proof-positive that you are open to resistance and it will buy you a broader support base in the long run.

Along the way, give people opportunities to express what they feel they might be losing. Often, a sense of confidence and ease are lost as people move into new ways of doing things. Sometimes it's possible to offset this sense of loss by allowing people to make decisions about the roll out of the new change initiative.

Convening a change coalition to help guide the change can be useful, but be wary of creating an inside and outsider group. The coalition's purpose should not be to make decisions, but to be the conduit through which information flows up and down, so that the change leaders can make more informed choices. When you use feedback or inputs from the change coalition, be sure you let the people downstream know that their feedback was used.

In a change initiative, it's key that people know what the purpose and vision for the change are. It's frustrating to be told you have to change when you're not clear about why the change is taking place or what the intended result will be. People need not only to see a plan for change, but their need to see specifically what their role is in designing and executing the plan.

For best results, be sure the first few assignments in the change initiative are sure-fire winners. When people succeed at those first few easy tasks, be sure to share their success, building momentum and proof that the initiative is on track.