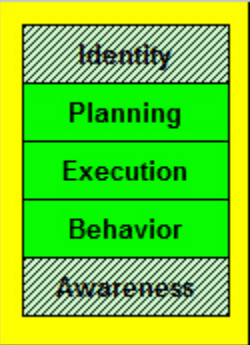




Management Concepts Series – 2010

* Common-Sense Guidelines for Successful Organizations *

	Management Concept #4 <i>The Nature of Resistance</i>
<p>Active Management Pillar Applicability</p> 	<p>Resistance is a natural and normal part of management. It comes in various forms and disguises. It can be good, bad, or neutral. It cannot, however, be ignored.</p> <p>If you are not getting resistance and disagreement, either you or your staff is not doing their job. Perhaps you are not being bold enough in your ideas or your team is not strong enough to confront you. You need resistance and disagreement. They are the keys to creating, vetting, and finally implementing the best solution possible. They test ideas and provide the heat to temper them and give them strength. If you do not encounter resistance and work it through, it will live on in underground caucuses that undermine your ability to act as a team and move forward.</p> <p>As you deal with resistance, try to understand its nature. There are four major categories of resistance:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Legitimate and Correct Resistance: You could be wrong. You may be getting resistance because you are about to do a really dumb thing. Be open to the possibility. Adjustment Resistance: You are actually getting agreement but the ideas are in need of tuning or overhauling. Fear-Based Resistance: Fear-based resistance is, surprisingly, something you can work with in a fairly straight-forward manner. There is a fear or concern about the process or the outcome: I will be personally affected negatively. It will be detrimental to a group. It will fail. We don't know how to do it. Fear-based resistance can usually be mitigated or defused. Belief-Based Resistance: This is the hard one. If a fundamental belief is in play, it is often extremely difficult to overcome. Leadership, listening, and decision-making become critical to working through belief-based concerns. <p>Misdirection: In all of the above, watch for misdirection and hidden agendas. Fear-based resistance will almost always try to dress as something else. You will need to probe, listen, and talk to be sure you understand the nature of the resistance you are encountering.</p>

The Nature of Resistance

In most phases of your management career, you will need to deal with resistance of various kinds. Resistance and disagreement are two close siblings. As a leader and a manager, you should understand that you will need to deal with resistance and you should encourage and embrace disagreement.

- ❖ **Disagreement:** Disagreement and discussion are at the heart of getting it right. You are perfectly capable of saying “Yes” to yourself. You do not need your staff and co-workers to do it. Disagreement, discussion, and rigorous debate allow the brilliance of the whole team to contribute to the best solution and outcome. If you find yourself getting support and agreement more often than not, you might want to do a little snooping around. Eventually the truth will out. Get copies of “The Emperor’s New Clothes” by Hans Christian Andersen and give it to your staff. Let them know you will not be caught wearing imaginary clothes.

- ❖ **Resistance:** Resistance is inevitable. It is a form of inertia and is usually a reaction to proposed or implemented changes. It is important that resistance be handled and worked through. In order to do that, you should try to understand the basis of the resistance:
 1. **Legitimate and Correct Resistance:** You could be wrong. You may be getting resistance because you are about to do a really dumb thing. Be open to the possibility. Make sure you can explain clearly and succinctly (and without logical holes) why you are asking people to pursue the course causing the resistance.
 2. **Adjustment Resistance:** You are actually getting agreement but the ideas are in need of tuning or overhauling. Treat this behavior as support and embrace the offer.
 3. **Fear-Based Resistance:** Fear-based resistance is, surprisingly, something you can work with in a fairly straight-forward manner. There is a fear or concern about the process or the outcome. Some examples of fear-based resistance include:
 - I will be personally affected negatively.
 - It will be detrimental to a group.
 - It will fail.
 - We don’t know how to do it.

Fear-based resistance can usually be mitigated or defused. Look for the key items triggering the reaction and try to find the action or assurances that can defuse the concerns. The answer may be as simple as listening. It may be a risk-taking and safety issue. It may be training and support. Within the cost-benefit structure of the item(s) being resisted, take the mitigation steps to deal with the fears.

Hint: A good place to start when dealing with fear-based resistance is the discovery of some high-level outcome all parties can agree upon. Once that is done, it is much easier to peel back the onion to find the true locus of the issues.

- 4. Belief-Based Resistance:** This is the hard one. If a fundamental belief is in play, it is often extremely difficult to overcome. Leadership, listening, and decision-making become critical to working through belief-based concerns. Again, look for common ground. But be aware: the true believer is hard to convince and change.

Resistance and the Team

Disagreement should be embraced and leveraged to a more rigorous and effective outcome. Resistance should be handled, as often as possible, within the context of the ongoing team. However, it may come to the point the leader and manager must make the hard decision to assure continued forward movement. The team deserves, and success depends upon, strong leadership that can manage through disagreement as well as mitigate and defuse resistance when possible. But in the end you must make sure everyone on the team is in the same boat pulling in the same direction. It may be uncomfortable, but it needs to happen.

A final note: If the resources are within your span of control, you need to manage and control the process. If the resistance and disagreement are in areas beyond your control, you must try to determine when discretion is the better part of valor and redirect your efforts rather than beating your head against a wall repeatedly.