

## Change Resistance – What Does it Cost Your Organization?

By Stephen M. Dent

Everyone in the office knew it was coming. They just didn't know when. The telltale signs had been evident for months as strangers had been coming in and measuring things, calculating, and meeting behind closed doors.

The rumor mill had been spinning faster than a fan blade on a jet engine, so the impending change wasn't really "news" when the law firm announced to all personnel that it was merging with another firm and would be moving its offices to a new building across town in two months.

A sense of grief and disbelief permeated the air. Andrea, a paralegal assigned to crucial discovery tasks in a massive class action suit, was concerned about child care after the move. Sam, the law librarian the lawyers depended on, was not happy about the longer commute. Brian in the accounting department was concerned about whether he would have a heavier workload. Sarah was worried about easy access to the elevator and whether there would be time to drive to restaurants for lunch with her friends in the building where the firm was currently located. And Ron was wondering whether he would get stuck in an office with a view overlooking construction of a new freeway instead of the soothing view of a nearby park he enjoyed from his current office.

Although no one would be losing their jobs, the consolidation of offices created a huge amount of angst amongst the employees and even the lawyers. Their lives would be forever changed. Harlan, the managing partner and project manager for the move, didn't understand why so many people were upset. I had consulted with Harlan and the law firm on other matters in the past.

"It's not like they losing their jobs," Harlan said to me in a phone call. "And they should even like the new offices better. The building is more modern, closer to the freeways and the new light-rail train stop, and it's across the street from a brand new complex with a multitude of options for shopping, eating, and relaxing. What more could they ask for! I thought they'd be happy," he declared, with total sincerity. "But they're filled with anxiety over this move."

Two weeks later, my phone rang again. It was Harlan, pleading to meet with me. "Things here have gotten out of hand here with our move," he stated. "Just this morning Andrea was in my office in tears over this move. I thought she was worried about her job, but I was shocked when she told me she needed to resign because she didn't want to find a new day-care provider and with the new commute she wouldn't be able to pick up her children before the day-care closing time."

This was just the tip of the iceberg. Productivity was down; morale was as low as he'd ever seen it and several other employees had turned in their resignations.

Who would have ever thought a move across town could create such a commotion?

Change impacts people's lives. While a move across town may seem inconsequential to office space planners, it impacts the workers in the office in different ways based on their individual value structures. Each person has a set of values based on a number of dynamics that occur during their lives. When change occurs, people fear that their needs, based on their values, will go unmet. This fear creates internal anxiety that leads to change resistance.

Partnership Continuum's solution for the law firm began with administering our Change Resistance Assessment to all personnel in the office. The Change Resistance Assessment first helps people understand their values as they relate to change. It then provides guidance in helping them develop personal strategies to make sure they get their needs met, reducing their personal anxiety and increasing their focus on their work instead of the change they are experiencing

The Change Resistance Assessment identifies six universal core values that may become obstacles to change. Those core values are:

- Relationships
- Control
- The Familiar
- Security
- Mastery
- Status

Understanding how important these values are to an individual is the first big step towards overcoming them, thus reducing the fear and anxiety often associated with change.

Let's see how this helped Harlan's law firm.

Remember Andrea, who was concerned about child care? In the Change Resistance Assessment, she ranked high in two areas that impacted her anxiety to the point of her being ready to quit her job. She valued the relationship she had with the current day-care provider; she trusted them and believed that her children were safe and comfortable in that environment. She also valued the Familiar; she knew what to expect from the provider, how to get there, and the route home. These were important issues for her, even though she had not really previously thought about these issues until the announcement of the change.

Once she understood what was happening to her, she and Harlan discussed the situation, and he agreed to allow her to come to work half an hour earlier, thus leaving earlier, which would allow her get to the day-care provider before it closed.

The assessment helped Sam the librarian realize that he placed high value on things that are Familiar, so it was the routine of the commute that mattered to him, not necessarily

the length of the commute. Once he understood that, he realized he could just drive to the light-rail station close to his home, take the light-rail train to work, and save time and money too.

Brian learned in the Change Assessment that he valued mastery and was fearful that the heavier workload might include new responsibilities for which he wouldn't have the necessary skills. The Human Resources department set him up for training for his new job, and the new skill set would improve his career path.

Sarah would miss her friends at the former location, but she was given permission to work one hour longer on Fridays twice a month after the move so she could take a longer lunch hour and meet her friends across town for lunch. Ron was assigned to an office overlooking the freeway construction project, but the new office had more space to accommodate new employees, and Ron was also assigned a paralegal to help him with his workload.

In the end, while not everyone was totally pleased with the upcoming move, the Change Resistance Assessment helped Harlan understand how to retain valuable employees despite the change. The anxiety level in the office eased, people felt more comfortable with the change, and they got back to conducting business.

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*If you are an individual facing change on the job, our online Change Resistance Assessment can help you identify your fears associated with the change and assist you in developing strategies for getting your needs met despite the change.*

*If you are a manager, team leader, or executive facing change-resistance situations in your organization, you, like Harlan in the case study above, could benefit from having your employees take our online Change Resistance Assessment.*

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