

changingorganisations: The Newsletter (No 1: February 2009)

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Hi there,

This is my first monthly newsletter, [changingorganisations](#), for my clients and those professionals interested in organisational change. In my work I aim to help organisations bring about dramatic change without killing the daily operation. This newsletter includes my latest thinking, recent research, tips and practical and effective ways to implement change.

This month's topics include:

- Dealing With a Resistant Individual
- Hot off the Blog – Benner's Novice to Expert
- Next Speaking Engagement

Dealing With a Resistant Individual

This article provides practical advice for dealing with a key individual who is resistant to change. They may be holding out alone, or perhaps they are negatively influencing others.

The great insight from social constructionism is that we are not independent isolates, our reality is constructed with others as a social phenomenon.

It can be very helpful to keep this in mind when you are dealing with people who are (or seem to be) resistant to change. In order to dissolve the resistance, it is necessary not for the other person to change, but for the relationship between you and the resistant person (or people) to change. In our socially constructed world, if you change your relationship with that person, their resistant attitude will also change. As you'll appreciate, this is quite different from the standard change rhetoric which advocates persuasive communication to change the other person's point of view.

Here's what to do. Invite the person to talk with you on neutral ground. Over a coffee away from the workplace is a good start. The purpose is to enter into what I call a 'joint enquiry' with the other person.

'Joint enquiry' means that you have a perspective on the situation, and you recognise that so does the other person. By hearing the other person's perspective and by expressing your own, and being open to changing your own views, you will reach a new understanding of the situation, and with this shift in understanding comes a shift in the resistance.

Here is a four-point action plan for a 'joint enquiry' into the situation that will change the resistance of the other person.

1. Ask what their point of view is. Then summarise it back to them. If you have already heard their point of view previously, summarise your understanding of their point of view.

Lawyers and debaters often do this when they are rehearsing their arguments. The powerful key here for dissolving resistance to change is to express it in non-judgmental and non-personal terms. Don't say "You did not support the improvement to the quality system because you are not a team player," Instead say either "You did not support the improvement to the quality system because you were concerned about the impact on overtime," or "You did not support the improvement to the quality system and I do not understand why not. Can you please tell me?" Then summarise back to them what they have said to you.

2. Ask the other person if you have understood the situation accurately from their point of view. Allow them to make any corrections they think are needed.
3. Given what you have heard, explain your (amended) point of view, again using non-judgmental language. Keep your explanations free of value judgments as much as possible. Point out aspects of how your viewpoint has similarities as well as differences.
4. Agree next steps – some specific actions that you will each take, or something you are each committed to change in relation to each other. For example, "I will tell you if you do something that I don't agree with."

You may not need to go to step three, as steps one and two are so powerful.

Hot Off the Blog - Benner's Novice to Expert

Patricia Benner's 'Five Stages Of Skill Acquisition' from novice to expert is one of the most popular Google searches people use to find the blog [Changing Organisations](#). This was a surprise to me as I hadn't realised how much interest there would be. The five stages Benner identified are: Novice, Advanced Beginner, Competent, Proficient, Expert. Five [blog articles](#) summarise each of the stages and the implications for developing expert leaders.

The stages intuitively make sense, but following them would significantly change how you would approach leadership development. For example, instead of asking your experts what rules they follow (they don't remember the rules), you would ask them to describe specific situations in which they had to exercise judgement. Ask them to describe what they did and why they chose that option and not a different one. In other words, get them to reflect on their practice. This is partly why case studies are so useful in leadership development, but too often fictional cases are used instead of the expert experience available in the group and not enough time is spent on actual leadership practice.

Next Speaking Engagement

I am speaking at the Human Resources Institute of NZ on "Complexity and Organisation Development" on 17 February 2009 at 5.30 pm. More details [here](#).

Thank you for your interest in our work. Our purpose is to provide value in your change endeavours.



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General Manager
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Changing Organisations is a monthly electronic newsletter sharing ideas for leading and implementing change, by Stephen Billing, Doctor of Management. We encourage your [feedback](#). The names on this list are never provided to any other party, for any purpose, at any time.

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