

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: THE DEFENDER ROLE¹

What is often considered to be irrational resistance to change is more likely to be either an attempt to maintain the integrity of the target system or opposition to the agents of change.

Examples:

- Opposition to real threat (e.g., more taxes for schools)
- Maintaining integrity – change creates dissonance, threat to self-image (self-esteem, sense of autonomy, competence)
- Resistance to agent(s) of change:
 - Nature of change (magnitude, rapidity, perceived irreversibility)
 - Mistrust because of differences in knowledge and/or values
 - Mistrust of motives, especially if kept secret
 - Perception of defeat as the only outcome (created when change agent is unwilling to consider new data or alternative actions)

Resistance is inevitable and a positive force: "...social systems seek ways in which to defend themselves against ill-considered and overly precipitous innovations."

The Defender Role:

"Defenders" against change can be valuable; they usually have something of great value to communicate about the nature of the system. When failing to acknowledge them, the change agent may ignore potential flaws in the plan and/or get into unnecessary conflict situations. On the other hand, defenders can be co-opted to contribute to change. If you listen to them, they can:

- point out any lack of identification of changers with system's core values,
- raise your awareness of any unanticipated threats to well-being,
- help you avoid dysfunctional change (change that would reduce system integrity).

¹ From D. Klein, "Some notes on the dynamics of resistance to change: The defender role." In Bennis, Benne, and Chin (Eds.), *The Planning of Change*.