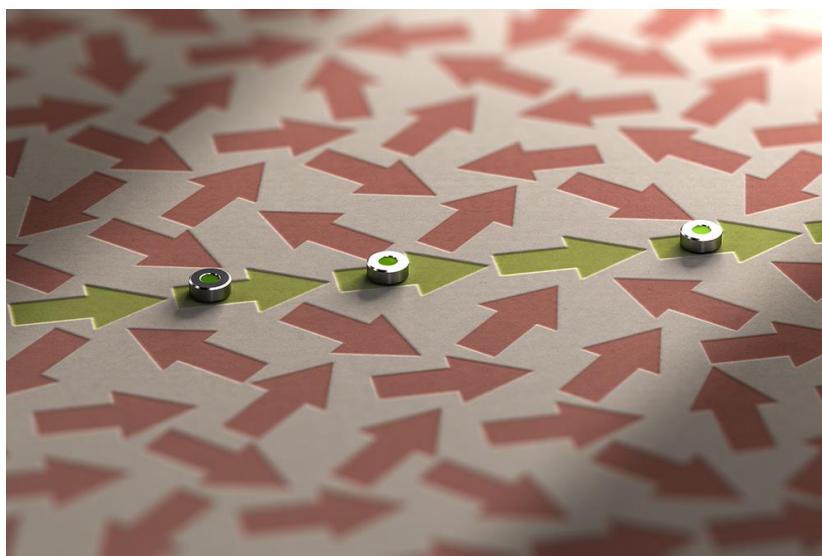


# 5 Steps to Gaining Employee Support During a Transformation

HRDailyAdvisor.com | By Tim Johnson | 2/23/21

Every organizational transformation brings changes with it, and change can often be difficult. Understanding the nature of resistance to change is the first step toward overcoming it and moving forward in a transformation. Following a process to create optimism and acceptance among employees is the second.



Source: Olivier Le Moal / shutterstock

But the most important key to successful change is making it people-first. Focusing on team members and giving them the tools and information they need to participate in a transformation initiative will help an organization navigate the difficulties along the way and successfully end its journey as a new, improved, and more competitive business.

## Learning Why Employees Resist Change

People process change in different ways. For some, change might bring a fear of the unknown. Others may see it as something that is going to disrupt their lives and routines.

And though there are varying reasons people resist change, they usually fall into three broad categories:

1. **Logic.** "We don't have the skills or resources to execute that change." Sometimes, resistance to change is based on an accurate assessment of an organization's capabilities (or lack thereof) and its readiness for change. However, rational reasons often thinly veil deeper, emotional misgivings about change. In many organizations, it's safer to deal with logic rather than admit to fearing change.
2. **Politics.** "If we make this change, I'll lose my power in the organization." While loss of status or a halt in career progression is a common reason for individuals to resist

change, others that revolve around organizational politics include mistrust in the people championing change or the desire to show that the decision to change is wrong. Political resistance usually ties to (mostly hidden) personal agendas, and people rarely confess to it.

3. **Emotion.** "I am afraid of this change and what it might mean to my job and my life." While logic and politics factor into change resistance, fear about the personal impact of organizational change typically is the main reason people reject it. Team members may be worried they can't adapt to new work requirements or are concerned about losing their jobs altogether. They also may be comfortable with the organization as it exists and have a difficult time letting go of the old way of operating.

## 5 Steps to Getting Employees on Board

While transformation management is about creating momentum to see results and growth, change itself is about empathy. The transformation process must be designed to successfully move hearts toward the end the organization is seeking. Minds will follow.

The key to winning over others is to answer their common, often unspoken question: "What's in it for me?"

These five steps can help:

1. **Share a clear vision for change.** Many organizations focus most of their resources on developing and implementing change and end up shortchanging the effort needed to communicate about and manage it. To overcome resistance and create buy-in, the organization must share a clear vision for change. The vision needs to include what needs to change and why. More importantly, it needs to paint a picture of what the new state will look like and why it's better. The vision for change should be aspirational—an achievement worth having that encourages pride and participation.

Communication is a key element of every transformation initiative. Projects must include detailed communications to reach all audiences at every step, from sharing the vision onward. The plan should define key messages and create awareness, educate team members, and update them on progress, which is possibly the most critical element of the plan.

2. **Define new roles and processes.** Because fear of the personal impact of change is the major contributor to resistance, the sooner an organization develops and discusses a road map for transformation and helps people become comfortable with it, the better. The road map should include new team roles and processes. Essentially, the road map should say, "This is the new way of working, and here's how you're going to be a part of it."
3. **Prepare people to assume their new roles.** It's not enough to define revised roles and processes; people need training and coaching to assume new responsibilities and

methods of operation. Building people to build performance involves teaching, showing, teaching again, convincing, debating, coaching, addressing gaps, rewarding, and sometimes disciplining but always expressing that team members are vital to an organization's destiny. Without adequate preparation, employees will be stressed, confused, and less likely to embrace change. Some may quit rather than try to make sense of a new way of working.

4. **Set up and share metrics that measure progress.** The metrics to gauge the success of a transformation depend on the type of initiative and an organization's goals and timeline. No matter the metrics of choice, choosing and communicating them early and often is critical. Metrics drive behavior and offer a sense of purpose. They define accountability, help employees focus, and inspire them to want to win the shift, the day, the month, or the year. Employees will then know how success looks and what is expected of them and their teams.

For example, a manufacturer might decide to implement significant process changes designed to increase production. Establishing and sharing production targets creates a performance atmosphere. Team members can understand the goals. Shifts get competitive, and those leading the initiative will know whether processes are changing and people are adopting new approaches.

Ideally, measurements begin with small wins and build up to more significant achievements. That approach offers opportunities to celebrate milestones throughout a long transformation initiative and helps keep the organization engaged and upbeat.

5. **Draw naysayers into the process.** When it comes to change management, renowned sociologist Everett Rogers developed the Diffusion of Innovation theory more than 50 years ago. For these purposes, let's use the theory to say that in any given organization, about 20% of employees will be ready for change and 20% will resist at all costs. Roughly 60% in the middle can be persuaded either way.

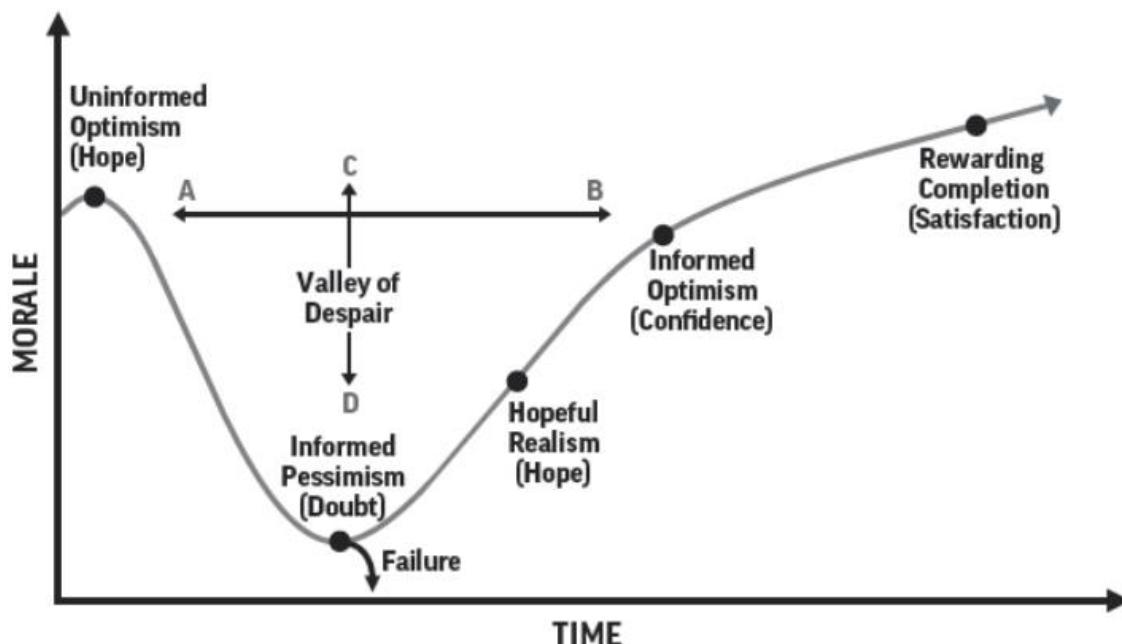
How will that happen? What information will they hear to sway them? Hopefully, they'll take in the positive company messages. But in every organization, there are unofficial channels that often focus on negative messages. These voices of resistance may have status in the company. However, they are often peer influencers whose points of view are regarded as highly as those from anyone in the power structure. If they believe a transformation initiative isn't going to work, they can sabotage it.

Ignoring those voices is tempting, and some organizations do. But it's more effective to pull them into the transformation. By making them part of the solution, you disable their resistance. It also can be helpful to include skeptics because they might see pitfalls and provide the chance to course-correct.

## Managing Through the Valley of Despair

Understanding the reasons people resist change and how to encourage employees to embrace it will help an organization navigate a transformation initiative. One reason creating buy-in is important is you'll have to deal with the tricky, but virtually inevitable, transformation phase known as the Valley of Despair.

## The Emotional Cycle of Change



The Valley of Despair is a low point of optimism about a transformation and the point where it is in the most danger of failing. Initiatives typically slide into the valley when employees are still fulfilling current responsibilities while also learning new tasks. Managing the depth and length of the valley to move up and out of it as quickly as possible is critical.

This is when creating buy-in pays off. A people-oriented transformation builds trust. It's also time to double down on communicating the organization's vision. Sharing accomplishments is even more important. To overcome the Valley of Despair and regain optimism, employees need to see that change is worth it.

Successfully transforming an organization is often seen as an exercise in project management. But in the end, it's only partially about systems, spreadsheets, and timelines. What matters most in the organization's journey are people and how leaders manage their transition to a new way of working. Understanding those dynamics and bringing team members along on that journey are the only paths to true organizational transformation.