**Choosing strategies for change: Kotter and Schlesinger’s change model**

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| **Meet the authors** |
| Professor John Kotter gained a degree in Electrical Engineering from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1968 before taking an MSc in Management in 1970. He then studied for his PhD in Business Administration at Harvard in 1972. After gaining his PhD, he was appointed to the staff at Harvard and was made a professor in 1980. He is the leading voice in change management and has written 18 books on the subject. In 2012, he won the McKinsey Award for the world’s most practical and ground breaking thinking in business/management. Dr Leonard Schlesinger is the Baker Foundation Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School, a role he took up in July 2013. Prior to that, Dr Schlesinger had been the President of Babson College. He works on the postgraduate MBA programme as well as lecturing on the Executive Education programmes. |

There is a saying in business that ‘standing still is not an option’ – however, many attempts to undertake change by managers and owners often result in unsuccessful outcomes. As humans, we have a built in defence mechanism in relation to change. Therefore, potential change needs to be carefully considered before it is executed.

The Kotter and Schlesinger model suggests that there are four reasons why people resist change:

1. Parochial self-interest – Here there are some people that are more concerned about how the change will impact upon themselves rather than considering how the change will improve the overall business.
2. Misunderstanding – If the rationale for the change is not communicated properly or if there is insufficient information relating to it.
3. Low tolerance to change – Some workers within the organisation will be far less tolerant to the concept of change, preferring there to be security and stability.
4. Different assessments of the situation – Not all workers will accept the reasons for the change taking place and may disagree with the stated benefits associated with the change.

The model then went on to consider six change approaches to deal with any resistance to change:

1. Education and communication – If there is a lack of information or the information is inaccurate there will tend to be more resistance to change. Therefore, educating individuals of the change, before it has occurred, is essential. This education allows employees to see the logic of the change and it helps to dispel any concerns and misconceptions of the change process.
2. Participation and involvement – This is related to the act of empowering employees to help to design the change process. This approach will tend to lower the resistance to the change as the employees start to take ownership of it.
3. Facilitation and support – As the change is taking place and employees are adjusting to new processes, it is important that manager build in support structures so that workers anxieties and fears are confronted. This might involve special training or counselling of staff.
4. Negotiation and agreement – With any change process, there will be those that lose out and are disadvantaged by the change. If these individuals have power they might be able to destabilise the change process. Managers can minimise this threat by offering incentives to individuals in return for an undertaking of not to resist the change. This might include a financial incentive in return for them leaving the company.
5. Manipulation and co-option – Here the strategy involves engaging key resisters in the change process, but in a superficial way. Perhaps providing these individuals with symbolic roles within the change process. If this works, it ought to encourage these key resisters to actually take ownership of the change process.
6. Explicit and implicit coercion – A last resort is to simply force employees to accept the change. This might be achieved by making it clear that any resistance to the change will lead to the employee losing their job, being transferred to another part of the business or being rejected from future promotion opportunities.