

Change and resistance.

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Companies are breaking new ground more and more to profit from progress, and are rethinking trusted structures. But every change is accompanied by one important, central challenge: the resistance of employees.

This means that there are no changes without resistance. But where do these negative doubts come from when changes are announced? We asked **Dr Dirk Lippold** about this. He is a guest professor for Consulting, Change Management and Marketing at the Humboldt University of Berlin. With over 35 years of professional experience as a business consultant and as managing director of an international consulting company, he came into contact again and again with change and resistance.

Change management has become the biggest buzzword for company management. What is currently driving companies to implement processes of change?

Dr. Lippold: First, we have to differentiate between the causes and the effects of changes. Causes for changes can be of an external or internal nature. External causes include technological or socio-

demographical developments. Internal causes could be bad decisions in the past, the loss of a strategic customer or growth initiatives. Effects of change processes are renovation, downsizing of personnel, introducing ERP systems, but also the creation of new sales channels. Such change processes must be accompanied by meaningful methods in order to reduce risks. This drives the company to implement change management..

How big is the danger that change processes will fail? What are the most frequent causes of this?

Dr. Lippold: The danger that change processes fail should not be underestimated, because each change is accompanied by resistance. Resistance can almost be seen as the “twin brother“ of change. The lack of acceptance, understanding, qualification and perspective among employees are the essential motives behind resistance.

Let’s assume that the majority of employees are against a process of change. Can bigger changes also be carried out – successfully – against the will of the employees?

Dr. Lippold: Changes against the will of a majority can be carried out, but not implemented successfully. Employees must be actively included in the change process. They must be addressed with suitable communication methods and measures, in order to generate a resistance-free image of change. A trustworthy form of communication is the basis for every successful change within a company.

You speak about the three types of resistance to change. What are behind these?

Dr. Lippold: Remaining with the family metaphor, you can say that resistance usually has three “fathers“: the first “father“ is Don’t Want To. This is a question of a barrier of intention with the affected employees. The fear of change and the desire to keep to the status quo lead to a negative attitude towards the planned change.

The second “father” is Can’t. Frequently, it is new technologies or also deficits in foreign language knowledge which lead to barriers of ability. The third “father” is Don’t Know. For those who don’t know, the new state is uncertain; they are not convinced that things will be better with the change.

Before the age of digitisation, Pierre Bourdieu discussed “social inertia”, which describes the desire for habit. Are there parallels between Bourdieu’s social inertia and the resistance to processes of change?

Dr. Lippold: Yes, the parallels are clear: it is nicer in your own comfort zone. Why then, should we discuss any advantages of change? If we are willing enough to invest money and time in personal further education or even just in gaining information, change management might even bear fruit.

Are there different phases that we go through when we experience a change at our workplace?

Dr. Lippold: Generally, employees go through seven phases which we can describe as an “ideal-typical” change process:

It starts with a shock about the big difference between the high expectations and the newly arrived reality. This is followed by the phase of adherence, which is relieved by the phase where we see the necessity of change. In the following phase, we experience acceptance and thus the “letting-go”. The fifth phase is characterised by trying out new behaviour patterns. Phase six involves recognising why certain measures lead to success and others do not. Finally, the last phase integrates the gained experiences and the new measures that were tested.

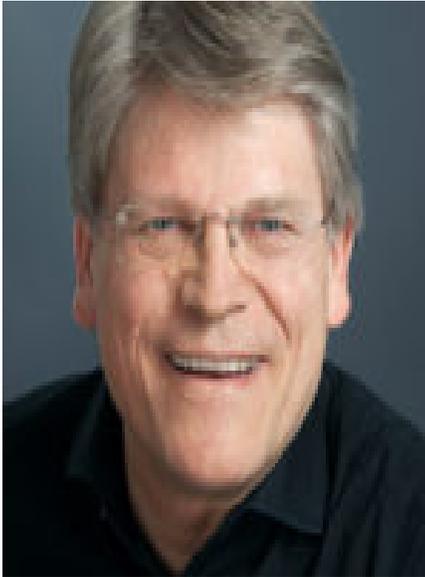
What is the role of the follow-up?

Dr. Lippold: The role of the follow-up cannot ever be overestimated. A good example of this is post-merger integration, which – almost as part of the change process during a company merger – has made itself self-evident in standardised consulting services. And without this, successful company mergers are unthinkable.

Have you yourself experienced big processes of change in your career, and did you have to come to terms with resistance of your own?

Dr. Lippold: I have been responsible for managing two large merger processes and also two programmes of restructuring. Particularly with the restructuring, I had to battle with my own

resistance.



Prof. Dirk Lippold is guest professor at the Humboldt University of Berlin and teaches Consulting & Change Management, Marketing & Communication, Personnel & Organisation, Technology and Innovation Management as well as Business Processes at various private universities. He spent 30 years working in the software and consulting sectors. As managing director of an international company consulting business, he and his teams developed the marketing equation and the personnel marketing equation as a process-oriented framework for action. In his most recent book, “Die Unternehmensberatung – Von der strategischen Konzeption zur praktischen Umsetzung“ [“Company Consulting – From Strategic Design to Practical Implementation“], he provides a comprehensive overview. www.dialog-lippold.de