WHY SOME BRETHREN RESIST CHANGE AND HOW TO RESPOND

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As Lodges, Metropolitan / Provincial / District Grand Lodges and UGLE plan and implement an increasing number of changes, a question often asked is how to persuade other brethren of the need to change. It is clear that, in some Lodges and Chapters, influential members sometimes delay or even block changes that others wish to implement.

In this paper I will:
1) examine why some people resist change,
2) outline six general approaches to managing resistance to change, and
3) consider some relevant situations encountered in Freemasonry and how they can be addressed.

What follows is an everyday explanation of research from the fields of psychology, management and organisational development and my own experience as a professional consultant, board level facilitator and coach. I have included references in the footnotes for those who want more in depth explanations.

Why do some people resist change?

<u>"No one likes change"</u>

I often hear this claim when I am discussing change. However, while it is true of some people, it is also clear that many people thrive on change. The difference between those who thrive on change and those who don't like it seems to come down to whether they perceive to gain or loose something from the change.

Generally, those who resist change don't want to lose something that is important to them and those who want to drive change recognise personal or collective benefits to be had from the change.

Understanding what people think they will gain or lose is the key to addressing resistance to change.

<u>Rational and emotional responses</u>

Resistance to change can involve both rational and emotional responses. The case for a change may make logical sense, although equally logical arguments may also be put forward to resist the same change. In addition, a proposed change often stimulates emotional responses in people, whether in favour or against.

Models of personality[1] recognise that while some people focus on rational or logical thinking others focus on emotional elements or responses. Therefore, both rational and emotional approaches and responses need to be understood and included in any approach to overcoming resistance.

<u>Types of resistance</u>

There are four main reasons[2] people resist change:

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[1] See for example Carl Jung's rational functions as described in https://www.businessballs.com/self-awareness/personality-theories-and-types/

[2] Kotter, J.P. & Schlesinger, L. A (1979) 'Choosing strategies for change', Harvard Business Review, 57, 2, pp. 106–114.

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1) Parochial self-interest

   This type of resistance arises when people expect the change to result in personal loss. Such people are putting their needs and interests above those of the wider group or organisation.

2) Misunderstanding and lack of trust

   A misunderstanding of the change, its rational, process, result or benefits, can prompt resistance to change, especially when there is poor communication or a lack of trust between the parties involved.

3) Different assessments

   Resistance may come when a person or people assess a situation, the reasons for change or the planned approach, differently from those who are proposing the change. It may be that they have information that the proposers don't.

4) Low tolerance

   When change is slow or non-existent, people can become familiar and comfortable with, "the way things are done around here." When change is then proposed or introduced people can fear that they will not be able to adapt or that the new reality won't be as comfortable for them, even if it promises rational benefits.

More about change

Driving and restraining forces[3]

   Driving forces are all those factors (ie, issues, actions, beliefs, potential benefits, etc) that are in favour of a change. Restraining forces are those factors (ie, objections, actions, fears, pitfalls, losses) which are holding back change. When the two balance each other, the situation remains static, although frustration may build on either side. Solutions include:

   a) increase the strength of the driving forces and force through change
   b) reduce the strength of the restraining forces
   c) a combination of both approaches.

The change curve

   The balance of rational and emotional responses tends to alter over time. The initial response to an unexpected change is often shock, followed by denial, then anger and even depression.[4] These initial emotional responses against the change tend to give way eventually to acceptance and more rational responses that range from cautious experimentation through to acting as a "change champion". When people expect the change, the initial responses tend to be more accepting.

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[3] Described in Kurt Lewin's Force Field Analysis model. See for example https://mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_06.htm

[4] Described in the Kubler-Ross Change Curve. See for example https://www.cleverism.com/understanding-kubler-ross-change-curve/

Responses to change resistance should take account of a person's position along this change curve, recognising that the same person may change their perspective over time.

Change types

Some people adopt a pattern of behaviour towards change. Appendix one looks at four "change types" and ways in which each can be encouraged to adopt a more favourable approach to change.

Approaches to change resistance

There are six broad approaches[5] that can be used to address resistance to change:

1) Education and communication

   This approach is generally the most useful but is especially so when there is a lack of information about, or understanding of, the need for change. Prior communication and education can prepare people for a change and can prompt more rational and less emotional responses. People who are well prepared for and anticipate change tend to react with less shock, denial or anger when the change is introduced.

2) Participation and involvement

   In general, the more people affected by a change can be involved in the change process, the better. This approach is especially useful when potential resistance might derail the change process or when others have important information necessary for the change plan. By involving the potential resistors in the change process, they are more likely to buy-in and champion the change.

3) Facilitation and support

   Some brethren struggle to accept or adjust to change, largely because the known and familiar world has become unknown or unfamiliar. At such a point their needs are similar to those of a new Freemason. Just as mentoring helps the latter adjust and integrate with Freemasonry, providing personal support and encouragement to those who are uncomfortable with a change can allay any resistance based on their fear of loss.

4) Negotiation and agreement

   When those resisting change are influential or hold power, negotiating key aspects of the change and offering incentives can win their support. This may slow the change process but will ensure it still progresses.

5) Manipulation and co-option

   Co-opting those who resist change onto the group planning or managing the change can secure their co-operation. This can be perceived as manipulative or patronising, so it needs to be a genuinely inclusive process rather than just a symbolic gesture.

6) Explicit and implicit coercion

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[5] Kotter, J.P. & Schlesinger, L. A (1979) again.

This approach uses power and authority to force through a change. It is a traditional approach to managing change in organisations, although is used much less often nowadays. It can still have merit or value when speed of change is important. However, it can also lead to resentment and increased resistance later so should be used with caution.

Situations in Freemasonry

In the following scenarios I identify some situations that can be encountered in Freemasonry, along with approaches that might be used to address them. In all these cases, using education and communication to establish the need for change, legitimise it and to prepare people for what is coming is likely to reduce eventual resistance.

1) A member believes Freemasonry and his Lodge should not change.

    Some of our long-standing members joined Freemasonry at a time of little or very slow change. Some believe that the practices and traditions with which they are familiar have their origins much further back than is actually the case. They may believe it is wrong to change the way the Lodge operates, often citing the work of predecessors.

    This is an example of misunderstanding and may cause considerable tension or distress. It may be accompanied by a fear that a new generation is harming the Craft. Overcoming resistance in such cases can take considerable time and patience.

    A good approach is to remind these members about the history of Freemasonry over the last 300 plus years, to demonstrate that it has continually evolved over this time. The problem is that the pace of change slowed after the Second World War until more recently, hence some longer serving members being uncomfortable with evolution and change. This is an example of using *education and communication* to address resistance.

    It may also help to explain that our predecessors made their decisions based on the circumstances of their time and that we need to do the same, to safeguard the future of the Lodge. In doing this, we would be using *facilitation and support* but should be careful not to come across as patronising.

2) A member misunderstands the scope of the change.

    The changes being considered by most Lodges, by Metropolitan / Provincial / District Grand Lodges and by UGLE itself, are about the way we organise and manage ourselves. They cover the organisational aspects of our Lodge practices, communication methods, decision-making, education, planning, administration and traditions. They are not about our purpose, ritual or any of the elements covered by the Ancient Charges or the Aims and Relationships of the Craft, both of which are defined in the Book of Constitutions and which are enduring and unlikely to change.

    If members do not recognise and accept the distinction between organisational aspects and those concerned with our purpose, landmarks or ritual then they may misunderstand changes that are being proposed. Once again, misunderstanding may cause considerable tension or distress. It may be accompanied by a fear Freemasonry is losing its purpose or direction.

    As with scenario one above, *education* is an effective approach, accompanied by clarification and reassurance.

3) A member disagrees with the case for change or with the proposed change.

A common situation in any proposed change is to meet resistance based on rational disagreement, whether it be with the argument put forward to justify the change or with the proposed plan for change itself.

This is an example of the third type of resistance, different assessment. It is relatively easy to address through *participation and involvement*, and possibly *negotiation and agreement*, unless it is accompanied by other types of resistance, including those with an emotional basis.

It is possible that the member who is disagreeing has information that would change the grounds on which the change is based. *Involving* such a member in the change process will normally resolve the disagreement.

4) A member fears the Lodge will change beyond recognition.

Long-serving members tend to have a deep attachment to their Lodge. It may have seen them through some difficult periods in their life, as well as good ones. It may represent a constant in an increasingly bewildering and uncomfortable world. Such members are unlikely to want to lose those features of the Lodge that are meaningful and comfortable to them.

This is an example of the fourth type of resistance, low tolerance to change. Forcing through a change could make such members very uncomfortable and is likely to meet with strong resistance.

A useful approach is through *negotiation and agreement*, asking the members to stretch – not break – the limits of their "comfort zone" in return for respecting and continuing something that is important to them, but which does not threaten the health of the Lodge.

It is useful to ask such members what they consider to be the Lodge's important features, the "red lines" beyond which they do not wish to go in any change process. Such a discussion can also highlight issues that they think are ready to be changed.

Respecting the wishes of such members will often secure their support. In time, once they have established new boundaries to their comfort zones, they may well be willing to go further, support others changes and even relax their own red lines. However, they are likely to want to to see that change is being well and respectfully managed before relaxing their positions.

In summary, understand the boundaries to members' comfort zones and, through *negotiation and agreement*, stretch but don't break them.

5) A member fears he will be out of his depth or shown up as inadequate.

If a change requires new knowledge or skills, such as when new technology is introduced, this can expose or highlight the "conscious or unconscious incompetence"[6] of members. Some may greet this as an opportunity to learn something new while others may feel inadequate, uncomfortable, insecure or may fear a loss of status.

This is another example of low tolerance and can often be addressed through *facilitation and support*.

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[6] Two of the four stages of learning. See for example https://www.businessballs.com/self-awareness/conscious-competence-learning-model/

An approach I have used successfully with insecure senior executives who fears embarrassment is to offer personal coaching in the new skill, without others knowing. The protégé can then emerge as competent and confident, leading change rather than passively following.

In summary, don't let anyone lose face.

6) A senior member fears he will lose status, involvement, influence or control.

Many long-serving Freemasons have built a particular reputation, status and sense of self-esteem on their long service to their Lodge(s). That self-esteem or status may rest upon their knowledge or central involvement in Lodge matters, or from being a controlling or influential person in major decisions.

This is an example of parochial self-interest, the first type of resistance, and it may involve emotional elements shrouded in rational argument. Change often increases the involvement and influence of those skilled in what is being introduced while retiring others from positions of influence.

A solution is to encourage the member or members to *participate* in the change process. Reassure them that change will only happen after discussion, that anything new would be tried, tested and checked before the change is implemented and that his wise counsel would be sought all the way through the process. Continued *involvement* respectful of his position may secure his support for the change process.

Some brethren may also need *facilitation and support* to help them think through the need for and approach to change, but this may need to come from a peer or someone perceived as more senior.

An experimental change that proved to be beneficial and successful is unlikely to be reversed by even the most resistant of members, especially if they are seen to be part of the change.

In summary, consult and involve the key influencers and respect their position.

In conclusion

Not everyone resists change but those who do tend to have a concern or fear about losing something. Understanding those concerns and fears, and the way they manifest in a member's action, is key to deciding how to respond to and address that resistance. We can use approaches to change developed in other organisations, together with an understanding of Freemasonry's principles and culture, to develop responses to resistance and implement change in a way that carries members forward together.

Tony Harvey
17th July 2020

Appendix one

Change types

One way to look at possible reactions to change is to consider positive and negative responses and action verses inaction. We can use this to help people move towards a positive and active response.

	Inaction	*Action*
Positive attitude	**'YES' PEOPLE** "I would if …", "I could if …"	**CHANGE CHAMPIONS** "I will … ", "I can …"
Negative attitude	**VICTIMS** "I won't …", "I can't …"	**CHANGE TERRORISTS** "It won't …", "It can't …"

1) Change Champions

   Characterised by a positive attitude and a willingness to try and to take action. Typically they :
   a) Identify with the positive benefits or opportunities of change
   b) Recognise a change as a challenge
   c) Are open to and willing to learn
   d) Stretch their personal comfort zones.

2) Yes People

   Display a positive attitude towards change, but do not follow through with action. Often say the right thing but do not contribute to change. They may :
   a) Agree that change is needed but are unwilling to change themselves
   b) Deny that change is needed in themselves
   c) Hope that the change won't impact upon them
   d) Avoid taking risks.

   To become a Change Champion, Yes People need to :
   a) Work to simple, step-by-step, targets
   b) Deliver short time-scale outcomes that involve some change
   c) Build their confidence
   d) Get regular supportive feedback.

3) Change Terrorists

   These people have a high level of activity, but it is focused towards negative or counter-productive outcomes. They may talk a lot, but they are critical and negative in what they say. Typically they :
   a) Identify the negative aspects of change
   b) Criticise plans, ideas and the people involved
   c) Are backward looking or past orientated
   d) Seek supporters
   e) Undermine the work of others.

   To become a Change Champion, a Change Terrorist needs to :

a) Listen more to other peoples' opinions
b) Express their concerns in a more constructive manner
c) Recognise that change is natural
d) Recognise how past changes have had a positive impact.

4) Victims

Victims have both a negative attitude towards change and a lack of drive. They are less vocal than terrorists, although they can lower morale by their demeanour. When they do express themselves, it is as a passive victim who has had things done to them. Typically they :
a) Bury their heads into the sand
b) Do the minimum required of them
c) Fail to give ideas real consideration

To become a Change Champion, a Victim needs to :
a) Recognise the effect they have on others
b) Concentrate on doing something positive, that makes use of their strengths
c) Get involved in a successful change
d) Respond to help and feedback.

Appendix two

Professional biography

In his professional life, W Bro. Tony Harvey works as a leadership consultant, board level facilitator and coach, and specialises in change and organisational development. After graduating from university, he worked for two years with adolescents with behavioural difficulties before spending seven years with the Medical Research Council, initially as a researcher and then managing scientific computer systems. He moved to the commercial sector to become head of training for an airline and then head of the HR and Training practice for an international management consultancy. In 1996 he set up his own management consultancy and has completed assignments ranging from designing and delivering bespoke and accredited management development programmes to training other trainers to professional qualifications to facilitating major turn round projects for large organisations.

Tony holds degrees in psychology & education and in management and professional qualifications in teaching, adult training, psychometric testing and neuro-linguistic programming.

He is a Member of the British Psychological Society (MBPsS) and a Fellow of the Society for Education & Training (FSET), the Learning & Performance Institute (FLPI), the Institute of Leadership & Management (FInstLM), the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (FCIPD), the Chartered Management Institute (FCMI) and of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, manufactures and commerce (FRSA).

Tony has written a number of books and articles relating to learning, training and personal & organisational development, the most recent of which was "Introducing the Success Cycle: six steps to achieving your dreams" in 2018.

Tony's professional website may be found at https://tonyharvey.online and his Masonic website may be found at https://prestonian2012.org.uk.

Appendix three

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