
IN THIS ARTICLE

*Change Management, Employee Attitudes,
Training Exercises*

An Exercise in Managing Change

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**SOME PEOPLE EMBRACE CHANGE;
OTHERS SHUN IT. USE THIS SIMPLE
TOOL TO HELP EMPLOYEES MANAGE
THEIR INDIVIDUAL REACTIONS TO
ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE.**

Today, no company can afford the status quo. The companies that thrive are those that thoughtfully embrace change so that they can manage it to their competitive advantage.

The new focus on change management vests trainers with new responsibilities. Change sparks powerful emotions, and people who are distracted by fear, anger, uncertainty, or sadness cannot learn. Along with teaching employees how to use various tools for change, such as problem-solving strategies, trainers must help employees make sense of and master their emotional responses to change. By doing so, trainers help engage all parties as supportive stakeholders in the process of change.

To help trainers foster organizational change, we developed the Reaction-to-Change (R-T-C) Inventory—an easy-to-use, broadly applicable tool. The R-T-C Inventory can stand alone as an exercise and also fits well into seminars on organizational change. You can use this inventory to help employees at all levels discover how they perceive and react to change.

The R-T-C Inventory provides a nonthreatening structure in which to explore and discuss those perceptions and reactions. This type of discussion helps people understand and modify their own reactions to change and understand and adapt to the reactions of their supervisors, subordinates, and co-workers. And, by prompting participants to reflect on what it takes to bring about positive change, it helps them develop ownership in the change process.

The inventory also serves as a diagnostic instrument. By exploring how individual employees react to changes in the workplace, the R-T-C Inventory casts light on how the organization as a whole responds to change. Managers and trainers can use these insights in their efforts to prepare employees for change, keep them informed, and get them involved in fostering change.

Describing reactions to change

In general, a person reacts to change in one of three ways: accepting and supporting change; complying with change in action but not in spirit; or resisting change, either passively or actively.

TABLE 1
The Reaction-to-Change Inventory

Directions: Circle the words below that you most frequently associate with change. (This table shows the value of each word in parentheses for scoring purposes. When administering the R-T-C Inventory, do not reveal the values until participants have finished the inventory.)

Adjust (0)	Different (0)	Opportunity (+10)
Alter (0)	Disruption (-10)	Rebirth (+10)
Ambiguity (-10)	Exciting (+10)	Replace (0)
Anxiety (-10)	Fear (-10)	Revise (0)
Better (+10)	Fun (+10)	Stress (-10)
Challenging (+10)	Grow (+10)	Transfer (0)
Chance (0)	Improve (+10)	Transition (0)
Concern (-10)	Learn (+10)	Uncertainty (-10)
Death (-10)	Modify (0)	Upheaval (-10)
Deteriorate (-10)	New (+10)	Vary (0)

The R-T-C Inventory consists of 30 words that illustrate the ways that people react to change. The 30 words, culled by experts from an original list of 45, were derived from the professional literature about organizational change. The words are listed randomly, but each falls into one of three categories: words that conjure positive images of change (such as "fun" and "opportunity"), words that depict change negatively (such as "anxiety" and "upheaval"), and words that cast change in a neutral light (such as "different" and "transfer").

Participants are asked to circle the words that they most strongly associate with change. (See table 1, "The Reaction-to-Change Inventory.")

All positive words have a value of +10. All negative words have a value of -10. Neutral words have a value of zero. Individual scores can range from a low of -100 (if a person circled only all 10 negative words) to +100 (if a person circled only all 10 positive words). If a person circled all the words, the positive and negative values would cancel each other for a score of zero. (See "Scoring the R-T-C Inventory.")

Field results

The R-T-C Inventory has been tested with 224 employees in three organizations—a regional hospital, a state bank, and a county government. At all of these organizations, as expected, some participants emerged

as supportive of change, some as resistant to change, and some as willing to comply with change. (See table 2, "Employee Responses to the R-T-C Inventory," on page 57.)

In these tests, more participants seemed inclined to support or accept change than to resist it. The strong showing might reflect the fact that more managers than nonmanagers participated in these tests. Managers more often introduce and champion change.

In all three cases, the R-T-C Inventory prompted participants to suggest ways that their organizations could do a better job of fostering change:

- ▶ involving employees in the process early on
- ▶ giving employees a meaningful say in what changes would take place and when
- ▶ communicating about changes more frequently
- ▶ keeping managers highly visible as role models for change.

Prompting discussion

When using the R-T-C Inventory as a stand-alone exercise, try to limit groups to 20 participants. At the beginning of the exercise, ask participants to complete the inventory and score it. (To calculate scores, show the values of each word on an overhead projector or read the words and their assigned values aloud.) Prompt discussion of inventory results with the following types of questions:

- ▶ Why do you think you react to change the way you do?
- ▶ What might make change easy or difficult for you?
- ▶ What are some common fears about change? How can we overcome them?

You also can use the inventory to explore particular changes that have taken place in a workplace. Ask participants to complete the R-T-C Inventory with a particular workplace change in mind that they perceive as negative. Then ask them to complete it again with another workplace change in mind that they perceive as positive. Have them score both inventories and compare the results.

Guide the discussion to focus on why employees react differently to different changes and differently from each other to the same change. The following questions can help:

- ▶ What factors make it more likely that a change will receive a positive reception?
 - ▶ Why might a person who welcomes one change resist another?
 - ▶ What principles should companies follow in introducing change, to ensure acceptance and follow-through?
- Build on this discussion by having participants brainstorm ideas for managing people who fall into each category. Ask participants the following questions:
- ▶ How can companies harness the enthusiasm of supporters to help promote change in positive ways?

Scoring the R-T-C Inventory

Directions: Your facilitator will provide you with a value for each word on the inventory. To interpret your score, total the values of all the words you have circled and compare the total to the following scale.

- ▶ Scores of 40 and above indicate strong support for change.
- ▶ Scores between 20 and 30 indicate moderate support for change.
- ▶ Scores between -10 and 10 indicate willingness to comply with change.
- ▶ Scores between -20 and -30 indicate moderate resistance to change.
- ▶ Scores of -40 and below indicate strong resistance to change.

TABLE 2
Employee Responses to the R-T-C Inventory

Range of Scale Values	All Employees		Managers		Support Staff	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Supportive of Change						
+40 to +100	67	30	54	38	13	16
+20 to +30	54	24	32	22	22	27
Compliance with Change						
-10 to +10	70	31	39	28	31	38
Resistance to Change						
-20 to -30	20	9	10	7	10	12
-40 to -100	13	5	7	5	6	7

N=employees of a regional hospital, a state bank, and a county government
(*employees of state bank only)

N=224

N=142

N=82*

- ▶ How can companies inspire commitment to change from employees who are just going through the motions?
- ▶ How can companies break through fear and apathy and involve employees who resist change?

No right or wrong

You also might use the R-T-C Inventory in conjunction with a personality-assessment tool, an approach that works well to illuminate how people with different personal styles respond to change. This strategy offers another chance to reinforce the message that healthy organizations need people with all types of personalities and who react to change in different ways. For instance, people who are inclined to resist change prompt organizations to think carefully about what they are trying to accomplish, and can inspire improvements in the change process.

When discussing the results of the R-T-C Inventory, underscore the value that each person brings to the change process, regardless of how he or she scores. Stress that there are no right or wrong ways to answer the inventory; it is designed to illustrate a continuum of reactions to change, not to assign labels (such as "supporter" and "resister") to participants.

The facilitator must enable participants to share their reactions comfortably and distill their perceptions into action plans for implementing change effectively.

A word of caution: Trainers need at least several years of experience and strong facilitation skills to administer the R-T-C Inventory. Beginning trainers might find it difficult to get participants to articulate why change makes them uneasy or what they fear from change.

Ongoing research suggests that the inventory eventually will evolve into a method for identifying the circumstances and emotions that trigger people's reactions to change and for assessing how well organizations manage various aspects of change. Meanwhile, the R-T-C Inventory can help further change in the workplace by prompting discussion of the fears and hopes that change inspires and identifying ways that organizations can tailor their change strategies and programs to address those reactions. ■

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