

MANAGING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

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This article offers (1) a conceptual framework for understanding resistance to organizational change, (2) guidelines for distinguishing between positive and negative resistance, (3) a process for systematically assessing the causes of resistance, and (4) practical suggestions for overcoming resistance.

The toughest challenge of organizational leaders today is to manage at the speed of change. With the breathtaking pace of technological advancement which will only continue to escalate, and the doubling of knowledge every 5 years, leaders face tremendous pressure as they try to gain support for change. Regardless of how good or necessary a change may be, resistance should be expected. A survey of 500 executives conducted by William Schiemann (1992) concluded that resistance was the main reason why organizational changes fail. A study by Hammer and Associates found that 60% of the reengineering projects that failed were due to employee resistance (Moomough, 1999). In a survey of 2,200 executives, managers, and employees conducted by Aguirre, von Post, & Alpern (2013) report that transformation efforts fail for three main reasons: change fatigue, lack of skill in sustaining change, and resistance to change. While preventing resistance completely is an unrealistic goal, the ability to manage resistance effectively has emerged as an essential skill. This article will help you do that by offering a conceptual framework for understanding resistance, and also practical suggestions for assessing and overcoming it.

Understanding Resistance

When people talk about resistance, they usually refer to specific behaviors observed in others. Thus it's commonplace to hear someone say, "He's resisting these new procedures," or "She's refusing to go along with the changes." Behaviors used to resist change fall into two categories: *active* and *passive* resistance. Some examples of both types are included in Table 1.

Behaviors such as these tell us that people are resisting change; however, they don't tell us *why*. The reason for this is that behaviors are external manifestations of internal issues within a person's mindset. In other words, behaviors are symptoms while mindset issues are causes. These distinctions lead to a definition of resistance. *Resistance* is a state of mind reflecting unwillingness or unreceptiveness to change in the ways we think and behave. Resistance can be contrasted with readiness, which is a state of mind reflecting willingness or receptiveness to change. Resistance manifests itself behaviorally by either active opposition to change or by attempting to escape or avoid it; readiness is manifested behaviorally by either active initiation of change or by cooperation with it.

Readiness is not the opposite of resistance, since an absence of resistance doesn't necessarily mean that someone is receptive to change. Other factors, such as lack of

information, lack of knowledge or skill, or an immediate need to attend to other matters, could interfere with readiness. Nevertheless, anything which causes resistance can be expected to undermine readiness at any point in time.

Table 1
Active And Passive Resistance

ACTIVE RESISTANCE		
Being critical	Blaming/accusing	Blocking
Fault-Finding	Sabotaging	Undermining
Ridiculing	Intimidating/threatening	Starting rumors
Appealing to fear	Manipulating	Arguing
Using facts selectively	Distorting facts	Raising objections
PASSIVE RESISTANCE		
Agreeing verbally but not following through.		
Failing to implement change.		
Procrastinating/dragging feet.		
Feigning ignorance		
Withholding information, suggestions, help or support.		
Standing by and allowing the change to fail.		

The most important factors making up a person's state of mind are his or her facts, beliefs and values. Facts are objective realities that can be proven with evidence ("We tried that before"), while beliefs are subjective assumptions, conclusions, and predictions ("It didn't work then; it won't work now"). Values are people's conceptions about what is important in life ("I want to be open and honest with everyone about this").

A clear distinction between beliefs and facts is essential, because people often state beliefs as facts ("I know I'm right, so what's the problem?"). Facts can be proven with empirical evidence, while beliefs are subjective assumptions, conclusions, or predictions. In the thinking process, beliefs are more important than facts because they represent the meaning attached to factual information. We all know that facts are subject to distortion; two people exposed to the same set of facts can arrive at entirely different conclusions. Nevertheless, most adults have beliefs held with such high confidence that they treat them as facts. Beliefs of this kind are less amenable to change because they are regarded as irrefutable. When this happens, people are assuming that their beliefs and reality are identical. In one sense there is some truth to this. People's beliefs are their way of understanding themselves, other people, and the world around them. In essence, their beliefs become reality for them. It is indeed a mistake, however, when people conclude that their beliefs represent the one true concept of reality.

Since beliefs are subjective variables and not objective realities, their usefulness doesn't depend on whether they're popular but on whether they're *viable* (workable,

helpful, useful). Beliefs should be evaluated by their results, not by how good or bad they may sound. Viable beliefs will be accurately grounded on facts, making them reality-based, while nonviable beliefs will lack empirical evidence.

Thinking is a cognitive process, guided chiefly by one's facts and beliefs. In contrast, feelings have to do with emotions. Without feelings we might be able to think, but we would respond like robots. There's a strong relationship between the cognitive process of thinking, on the one hand, and feelings on the other. By themselves facts are neutral—they don't evoke any feelings. One person could look at a set of facts and ask, "What's all the fuss about?", while another person bellows, "The sky is falling!" It's the assumptions, conclusions, and predictions derived from facts that trigger feelings. The reason for this is that our mind can't distinguish between a real and an imagined threat. If we interpret an event as a threat, for example, our body releases adrenaline and we experience the emotion of fear, whether or not there's anything to be afraid of. Those feelings, in turn, influence our decisions and behaviors for better or for worse.

In addition to facts and beliefs, values are a crucial part of a person's state of mind. Once established, values become our criteria for making decisions and setting priorities. When evaluating a number of alternatives, we eliminate the ones that don't measure up to our standards. Some common values in organizations today are quality, learning, customer satisfaction, mutual interests, integrity, collaboration, and teamwork. Values are to people what instincts are to animals. Since animals can think and feel in varying degrees, it is the ability to establish values that makes us truly unique. Without this capacity, we couldn't be held accountable for our actions.

People have a vested interest in their values. Everyone wants to believe their values are the best ones or even the only ones. Since values are subjective variables, however, they can't be proven right or wrong. As with beliefs, therefore, values should be evaluated by their viability, not by how noble or lofty they may sound. Rational beliefs and the positive feelings they produce lead to values that foster growth; irrational beliefs and the negative feelings they produce lead to defensive values.

Any belief, value or behavior that has been previously successful in meeting our physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs will resist change. Beliefs, values and behaviors which have been consistently reinforced through experience will be the most resistant to change. In contrast, beliefs, values and behaviors which are less reliable in meeting needs will be more amenable to change. The degree of personal investment will be greater for the former than the latter. People develop such a strong commitment to their most reliable beliefs, values and behaviors that they have trouble thinking about themselves apart from them. In reality, they and their beliefs, values and behaviors become synonymous.

When people perceive that one of their established beliefs, values or behaviors is being threatened they experience fear and assume a defensive posture. The intensity of the fear can vary from mild to extreme, depending upon the degree of perceived threat.

Positive and Negative Resistance

Change can be defined as doing something new or differently. By itself, change is neither inherently good nor bad. Any change will make people different from what they were before. There's no such thing as a change with a neutral impact: people will either be better or worse off because of it. Anyone suggesting change should always be

aware of this. Although change can be evaluated by its consequences, it's impossible to know in advance how a change will turn out. After taking all the relevant factors into consideration, there are times when it's prudent not to change.

Similarly, there are other times when resistance is the best action. Unfortunately, the word *resistance* often has a negative connotation. This is a misconception. Sometimes resistance is the most effective response. If people's beliefs, values and behaviors provide them with constructive ways of meeting needs, then it's adaptive and healthy to hold onto them, and resist change. Some changes could disrupt this process and cause the person to become disorganized and less productive. In these situations it is in a person's best interests to resist change.

Thus, there are times when resistance is a *problem* and times when it's a *solution*. The focus of this article is on resistance which is considered a problem. We will now turn our attention to assessing this type of resistance.

Assessing Resistance

Finding the causes of resistance requires us to understand people's facts, beliefs and values. Since we can't literally *see* a person's facts, beliefs and values, the role they play in creating resistance can be difficult to isolate. Fortunately, we have a powerful source of information to help us with this task: observation of what people do and say. Everything someone does or says provides clues about the role these variables play in resistance. Therefore, when observing what someone does, ask yourself, "*What fact, belief, or value is being reflected by what this person is doing?*" Similarly, when listening to someone, ask yourself, "*What fact, belief, or value is being conveyed by what this person is saying?*" By consistently asking yourself these questions and putting the data together, not only will you come to understand people more fully, but you will be able to more effectively locate the causes of resistance when it occurs.

It's risky to try to assess the causes of resistance by observing only what a person does. It's easy to misinterpret other's behavior. Watching people in action definitely supplies clues, but additional information from what they say is almost always necessary to achieve an accurate assessment. While it's possible for resistance to stem from a single fact, belief, or value, this is unusual. More commonly a number of facts, beliefs, and values are linked together to form a pattern, so it's important to gather all relevant data.

A. Things People Say Indicating Possible Resistance

Here are some things people say that indicate possible resistance to change, classified as facts, beliefs, and values:

1. Facts

- a. "My doctor told me I shouldn't subject myself to too much stress."
- b. "All my friends are in this department."
- c. "I never had a course in accounting."
- d. "That isn't in my job description."
- e. "They just filed for bankruptcy."
- f. "Other companies that buy supplies from them say they never deliver on time."
- g. "You said you weren't going to make any more changes this year."
- h. "The turnover rate is already 25% higher this year."

- i. "We haven't received the training we were promised."
- j. "Why should we do that? We haven't received a salary increase in three years."

2. Beliefs

- a. "I'm too busy to do this."
- b. "I'm a follower, not a leader."
- c. "Yes, but. . ."
- d. "He just tells people what they want to hear."
- e. "He makes those changes just to harass us."
- f. "He's more concerned with protecting his security than anything else."
- g. "Watch out for him."
- h. "In this company, it's not what you know but who you know that counts."
- i. "Here we go again."
- j. "That will never work here."

3. Values

- a. "It's not important to me to have more authority."
- b. "That's not on my list of priorities."
- c. "It's essential that we're honest with each other."
- d. "What you think really doesn't matter to me."
- e. "Working with them is something I'd rather not do."
- f. "Our mission should be. . ."
- g. "What we need to emphasize is. . ."
- h. "In the future, I'd like to see the organization. . ."
- i. "We should be devoting more energy to. . ."
- j. "Who cares what the goals are? I just do my job."

B. Common Causes Of Resistance

Although there are many possible causes of resistance, in my experience the following eight reasons are the most common:

1. They Believe The Change Process Is Being Handled Improperly. When change is being proposed, people invariably have three questions: (1) Why? (2) How will it effect me? and (3) What's in it for me? Answering these questions effectively is crucial to preventing or minimizing resistance. Thomas Head (2000) said that resistance is usually caused by the change process (the how) instead of the intervention itself (the what). In their study, Aguirre, von Post, & Alpern (2013) found that 44% of employees reported that they didn't understand the change they were being asked to make. In the same study, the #2 reason given for resistance was respondents didn't feel involved in the change process.

In addition to not having their questions answered, people resist change when they didn't have any input into the decision, they didn't like how the change was introduced, the change was a surprise, the timing of the change was bad, or they felt manipulated or deceived by management. People react to things like this with anger and resentment, because the methods used go against their values and violate their need for

respect. We live in an age when employees expect to have their views considered, and to be treated with dignity. Therefore, people should be asked for input if:

- a. They will be affected by the change.
- b. You need their commitment to implement the change.
- c. They have information or ideas to contribute.
- d. They expect to be involved.
- e. They could learn from the experience.
- f. You want to expand or strengthen your base of support.

When initiating change, it's important to identify rewards that relate to employee's values—money, benefits, and new opportunities, for example—and build them into the change process, so they'll have a greater sense of ownership. People will be much more likely to support the change and help make it work, if there's something in it for them.

2. They Believe There Isn't Any Need For The Change. Beckhard and Harris (1987) suggested that the degree of resistance is related to three factors: level of dissatisfaction with the status quo, desirability of the perceived change, and the practicality of the change. One of the most common causes of resistance is that people are content with the way things are now—if it's not broken, don't fix it. As long as this is true, change will only be viewed as unnecessary or negative.

Sometimes change is needed to avoid or escape a harmful situation. Some examples are bankruptcy, a hostile take over, or a decline in market share, profit, revenue, productivity, quality, morale, competitive position, and so on. A lot of the changes being introduced in American organizations now are in response to increased competition from other countries. Leaders maintain these changes are necessary to survive, but a lot of employees simply don't believe this, since they can't literally "see" the competition. Many of these employees are in denial, and need to face reality or be left behind.

3. They Believe The Change Will Make It Harder For Them To Meet Their Needs. As such, they believe the change will make things worse, rather than make things better. Brehm's (1966) research showed that people resist change that they believe represents a loss of personal choice. In situations like these, facts tend to be less significant than the beliefs (assumptions, conclusions, and predictions) derived from them. For example, when managers talk about making the work more "efficient," employees often interpret this to mean that they will be doing more work. Also, if a change is presented as making the work easier, employees worry about positions being eliminated. Such concerns must be addressed to gain support for change. It's natural for people to think about how they're going to be affected by change, but unviable beliefs about bad things happening are damaging, because they are often based on inaccurate, incomplete, or mistaken information. These beliefs lead to fear, and values that emphasize protecting oneself against the perceived threat.

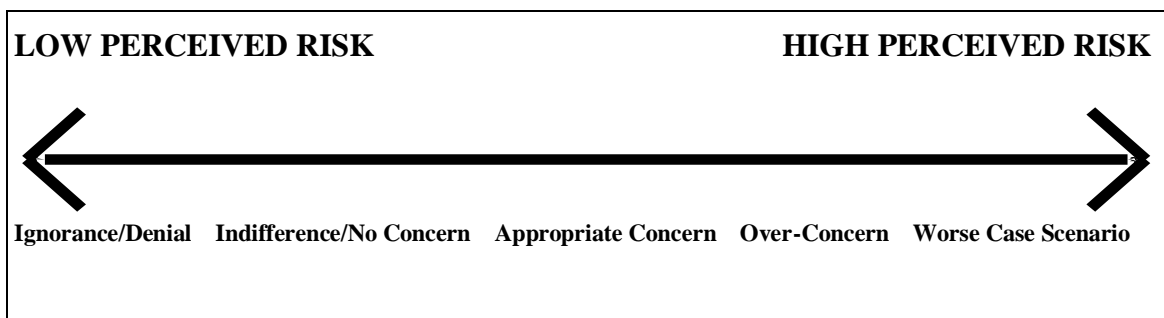
While it seems like ancient history now, even though it was only a few years ago, this was one of the main reasons people resisted learning computers. Protesting that computers would make their work harder rather than easier, they continued using conventional equipment until they had to choose between becoming computer literate or

being unemployed. For many of these people, claiming that computers would make their work harder was actually only an excuse to cover up their fear of the new technology.

4. They Believe The Risks Outweigh The Benefits. People are simultaneously motivated to meet their needs and to prevent bad things from happening, so accurately anticipating or predicting the probable outcomes of their actions is extremely important. Since we can never be absolutely sure how our actions will turn out, there's risk associated with everything we do. There's risk in change, but there's also risk in not changing ("What will happen if I change?", "What will happen if I don't change?"). Staying the same doesn't make people immune from risk. Nevertheless, people vary greatly in the degree of risk they perceive in a situation. Some people see gloom and doom around every corner, while others see a silver lining. In a team meeting where members are discussing a possible change, some may see a great deal of risk, while others may see little or no risk. The discussion can turn to conflict, as members assert their competing perspectives.

As shown in Figure 1, the Belief Continuum, the degree of perceived risk can range from none at all to extremely high. When contemplating change, an appropriate degree of concern is necessary to avoid mistakes, but people are capable of either underestimating or overestimating risks. Those who underestimate risks often regret their action, while those who overestimate risks often regret their inaction. It's natural for people to consider the worse case scenario, if only briefly. It can become a serious problem, however, if people treat the worse case scenario as an imminent reality, when the probability of its occurrence is remote.

Figure 1
Belief Continuum



To avoid either underestimating or overestimating risks, it's essential to have accurate facts and viable beliefs. Effective risk management, contingency plans, and feasibility studies would be impossible without such data. Inaccurate facts and unviable beliefs undermine efforts to plan and implement change. People who underestimate risks ignore relevant concerns, while those who overestimate risks will have too much concern. Either way, organizational growth is hindered.

In a cost/benefit analysis facts are actual costs, beliefs are anticipated costs, and benefits are values. Expectancy theory holds that people will be motivated when they believe that they can perform at the level necessary to attain rewards, and that these rewards are worthwhile (Lawler, 1973; Vroom, 1964). Something is only a benefit to

people if it relates to their values. If people really want something, they'll be willing to pay more for it (actual cost), and take more risks to get it (anticipated cost). Figure 2 presents the following four scenarios, which describe the interplay between facts, beliefs and values in a cost/benefit analysis:

Figure 2
Cost/Benefit Analysis of Change

		Perceived Benefit of Change	
		LOW	HIGH
Actual & Perceived Cost of Change	LOW	(a) Low Cost, Low Benefit	(b) Low Cost, High Benefit
	HIGH	(c) High Cost, Low Benefit	(d) High Cost, High Benefit

- a. **Low cost and low benefit.** The expected reaction here is indifference. Under these conditions, the perceived benefit would have to be increased in order to generate any interest in change.
- b. **Low cost and high benefit.** Conditions are favorable for change to take place.
- c. **High cost and low benefit.** Resistance to change can be expected. To foster change under these conditions, the perceived benefit would have to be increased to justify the high cost.
- d. **High cost and high benefit.** These conditions typically result in an approach-avoidance conflict. The decision to change would be difficult, as people weigh the high costs against the high benefits. In such situations, there's no substitute for accurate facts and viable beliefs.

5. They Lack The Ability To Make The Change. When people learn about a proposed change, one of the things they invariably ask themselves is, "Will I be able to do this?" In the study by Aguirre, von Post, & Alpern (2013), 48% of respondents said their company lacked the capability to ensure that change is sustained. Lack of ability may appear to be resistance, but inability and unwillingness are quite different. Whereas resistance represents an unwillingness or unreceptiveness to change, inability to change stems from lack of knowledge, skills, confidence and/or necessary resources. *Knowledge* and *skills* have to do with one's actual ability, whereas *confidence* has to do with one's

perceived ability. If people believe they can do something, they're more willing to try it; however, when they don't believe they can do it fear of failure increases their resistance. It's possible for people to possess the ability to change but still not believe that they can. In many cases, this belief becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Resources can be divided into two categories: working conditions and communication. Working conditions are largely concerned with the availability and allocation of such physical resources as staff, money, time, equipment and supplies; communication has to do with the interpersonal environment on the job, and concerns such things as the effectiveness of supervision, feedback, cooperation, encouragement, support, and the information one receives. People can have the knowledge, skills, and confidence, but still be unable to make a change due to lack of necessary resources.

As Figure 3 indicates if we take into consideration both willingness and ability to change, four scenarios can be distinguished.

Figure 3
Willingness and Ability to Change

	Willing to Change	Unwilling to Change
Able to Change	(a) Both willing and able to change	(b) Able but unwilling to change
Unable to Change	(c) Willing but unable to change	(d) Both unwilling and unable to change

- a. **Both willing and able to change.** In this scenario, the person both wants to change and can change. This is the combination most clearly associated with readiness to change.
- b. **Able but unwilling to change.** In this scenario, the person can change but for some reason doesn't want to. This is the combination most clearly associated with resistance to change.
- c. **Willing but unable to change.** In this scenario, the person wants to change but can't. In other words, the person lacks the knowledge, skills, confidence and/or resources necessary. Under this set of conditions, it's important to find out specifically why the person can't change or doesn't believe he/she can change, so that appropriate corrective measures can be taken. I've known managers who wanted to make the transition from a traditional hierarchical structure to a flatter, team-based structure, but they were so used to acting like a boss that they had difficulty sharing control. Some of them succeeded after considerable effort, while others failed in spite of everything they tried.
- d. **Both unwilling and unable to change.** In this scenario, the person neither wants to change nor can change. This combination poses an interesting challenge

diagnostically. It's important to determine if the person is really unwilling *and* unable to change. Sometimes people say they can't change when they just don't want to change. They would still resist the change, even if you helped them gain the necessary knowledge, skills, confidence, and/or resources ("I would if I could, but I can't so I won't"). In other cases people are openly critical of a change but the real issue, which often remains hidden, is that they don't believe they can do it.

At other times, people might want to change if they were able to. Helping them gain the necessary knowledge, skills, confidence, and/or resources, therefore, could produce readiness to change. In my work with organizations moving to self-directed teams, I've also encountered people who could make the change but don't want to, often because they don't believe this is an effective way to manage. These people either resist the change or take a job where they can continue operating as they have in the past.

6. They Believe The Change Will Fail. People can resist change because they don't have confidence it will work, or they don't believe the resources are available to implement the change successfully. The anxiety stemming from these concerns will make it more difficult for people to support the change effort.

When people believe that the change will fail, it's important to make sure that they aren't overestimating the risks. Also, as stated above, sometimes when people are afraid that they might not be able to make a change, they cover this up by insisting that the change won't work. You can usually tell there's an underlying issue, because they argue against the change no matter what you say. In cases like this, probing beneath the surface to get at the real issue is necessary to deal with their resistance.

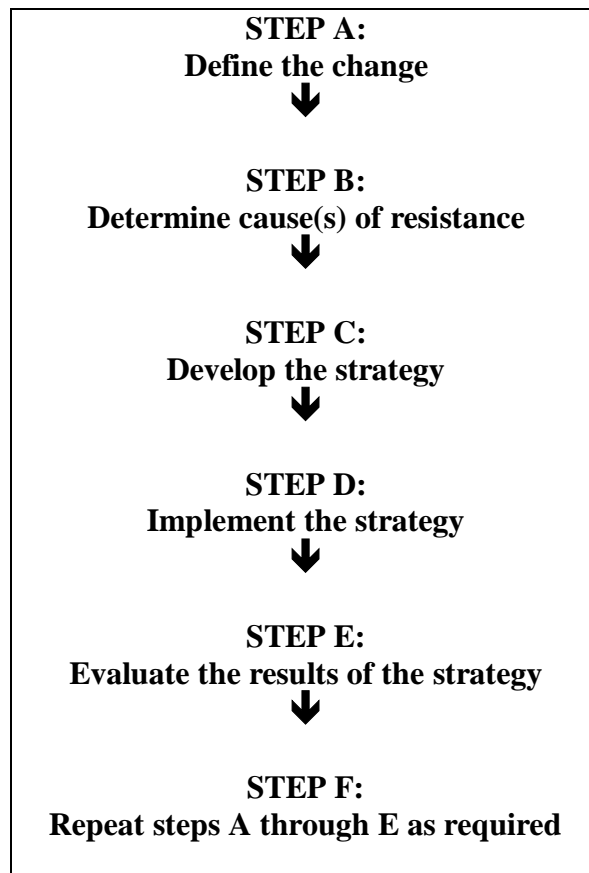
7. The Change Is Inconsistent With Their Values. Since values represent people's beliefs about what's important, they feel alienated if they believe the change conflicts with those values. Building greater compatibility between employee and organizational values is crucial to gaining commitment to change, and preventing or minimizing resistance.

8. They Believe Those Responsible For The Change Can't Be Trusted. People will resist change if they believe that leadership either doesn't have their best interests at heart, or isn't being open and honest with them about the change and its impact. Lack of trust is an insidious and pervasive problem, robbing organizations out of much-needed commitment and performance. Just how big of an issue is mistrust? In a survey conducted by the Lausanne Institute, 91% of 474 government supervisors reported that lack of trust negatively impacts productivity. An *INC. Magazine* survey reported that 84% of employees don't trust their managers. In an 2013 Associated Press General Social Survey poll, only one-third of Americans say most people can be trusted. Half felt that way in 1972, when the question was first asked. Lack of trust puts people in a defensive posture (see AP-GfK Poll: <http://www.ap-gfkipoll.com>). They spend their time protecting themselves from each other rather than focusing on organizational goals. If people have trouble trusting each other during routine times, this becomes an even greater issue during times of change.

Overcoming Resistance

The resistance strategy model, shown in Figure 4, is intended to take you step by step through a situation in which resistance is either anticipated or has already surfaced. The steps are as follows:

Figure 4
Resistance Strategy Model



A. Define The Change. It's important to be as concrete, complete, and precise as possible in delineating what you want to change. When people state a desired change in vague or general terms, they often trigger resistance inadvertently. Another common mistake is to define the change only in terms of the *end* result. However, most changes involve a series of steps. In order to minimize resistance, therefore, it's important to define the steps as completely as possible. Otherwise, you may wrongly conclude that your goal is being resisted when in fact the problem may only be with one step, for which there is a viable alternative.

B. Determine Cause(s) Of Resistance. After defining the intended change, determine who will be affected by the change and anticipate how they will respond to it. Ideally, you will be able to anticipate resistance in advance and take steps to prevent it. If resistance can't be prevented entirely, the next most desirable outcome is to minimize it.

Recall that resistance can stem from one or a combination of facts, beliefs, and values. Like putting together puzzle pieces, the more evidence you can gather from what people do and say, the better you will be able to separate causes from symptoms and develop strategies dealing with causes. Since you must infer facts, beliefs, and values from what people do and say, collect as much evidence as possible before drawing inferences. It's also important to regard your inferences as hypotheses, open to modification if additional information comes to light.

C. Develop The Strategy. After identifying the cause(s) of resistance, the next step is to develop a strategy to deal with it. There's no magic formula for dealing with resistance. Even if your strategy is well thought out, something can always go wrong. Every situation is unique, and human behavior is too complex to predict with certainty. For any given instance of resistance, there will usually be a number of possible alternatives. Try to be as creative as possible in developing alternatives, so that you don't prematurely rule out one that might be effective.

Overcoming resistance is essentially a process of impacting people's facts, beliefs, feelings, values, and behavior. Some methods for dealing with facts and beliefs are to verify facts, clarify beliefs, challenge unviable beliefs, and suggest more viable beliefs. Examples of what you can ask or say to do these things are given in Table 2.

Since feelings are primarily consequences of thinking, they can't be changed through direct intervention. It doesn't do any good to say to someone, "Don't feel that way." Instead, changes in feelings result from changes in facts and beliefs. Nevertheless, when feelings surface, it's very important to acknowledge and clarify them. Some ways of doing these things are listed in Table 3.

When resistance relating to values is encountered, some methods for impacting them are to clarify values, challenge unviable values, and suggest more viable values. Examples are presented in Table 4. Finally, some approaches for impacting what people do are to clarify behavior, challenge ineffective behavior, and suggest more effective behavior. Table 5 gives some examples.

In developing potential strategies, keep in mind that facts, beliefs, feelings, values, and behavior are interrelated. Change in one variable often has ripple effects, changing others as well. Thus, value change often leads to change in beliefs, feelings and behavior, belief change often leads to change in values, feelings and behavior, and so on. Here are some examples:

1. When people succeed at something they didn't believe they could do, this challenges them to reassess the accuracy of their beliefs. They are also likely to have a feeling of accomplishment, and perhaps even realign values to support the new behavior.
2. After people express their feelings about an upsetting change, they are often able to examine facts, beliefs and values more objectively. This also can prevent them from making an impulsive decision.
3. When people experience a value conflict (e.g. between being honest vs. being sensitive), feelings can inhibit their ability to act. Clarifying which value is more important can help them sort out their feelings and resolve the conflict.

At any given time a person will be more receptive to change in one variable than others. A common mistake is developing a strategy around a variable which is not receptive to change. It's a waste of time, for example, to try to change a person's value

for security, if the person staunchly defends that value. Instead, it might be more effective to indicate that after the reorganization everyone will be expected to engage in more risk-taking behavior.

Table 2
Interventions Aimed At Facts And Beliefs

Verifying Facts	<p>"What information are you basing that on?" "What facts do you have to back that up?" "Do you have all the facts?" "Are your facts accurate and complete?" "How do you know that's true?" "What additional data do you need?" "What evidence do you have?" "How did you arrive at that conclusion?" "How can you be sure?" "Do you need more information before making a decision?" "What are the costs?"</p>
Clarifying Beliefs	<p>"What do you think about that?" "What's your opinion?" "What do you think is the primary cause?" "If you tried that, what do you think will happen?" "Do you think that will work? Why/why not?" "What problems do you see with that?" "What do you think he will do?" "What are the consequences?" "What are the risks?" "What opportunities do you see?" "What alternatives can you think of?" "How can this problem be solved." "What conclusion have you reached?"</p>
Challenging Unviable Beliefs	<p>"Do your beliefs allow you to meet your needs?" "Could these facts be explained in any other way?" "What impact do those beliefs have on your feelings/ priorities/actions?" "That's not how I see the situation." "What are the chances of that happening?" "How else could his behavior be interpreted?" "Another way of viewing that would be . . ." "The facts don't seem to support that conclusion."</p>
Suggesting More Viable Beliefs	<p>"A more accurate way of looking at that would be. . ." "The facts tend to support the opposite conclusion." "You believe you have no other choice. Let's explore that to see if it's really true." "Another way of interpreting that would be. . ." "This is how I see the situation."</p>

Table 3
Interventions Aimed At Feelings

Acknowledging Feelings	<p>"I can see you're upset, can we talk about it?" "You sound angry, tell me what happened." "You're feeling frustrated." "You're really worried about this." "I can feel a lot of tension in this room." "Even though his actions make you angry, you're afraid to say anything." "You're discouraged because you haven't been able to make more progress."</p>
Clarifying Feelings	<p>"How does that make you feel?" "What are you concerned about?" "It looks like something's bothering you. Do you want to tell me about it." "What impact do your feelings have on your thoughts/decisions/actions?" "I know what you think, but I'm not sure how you feel."</p>

Table 4
Interventions Aimed At Values

Clarifying Values	<p>"What's most important to you?" "What outcomes do you want to see from this change?" "What's your bottom line?" "How would you prefer to deal with this?" "What is your preference?" "What factors do you think we ought to consider?" "What criteria should we use to evaluate alternatives?" "Which choice is most consistent with your criteria?" "What are your priorities?" "What are the benefits?" "If you had to make a choice, which one would it be?" "It looks like you disagree about what's important." "What would that accomplish?" "What purpose would that serve?"</p>
Challenging Unviable Values	<p>"I don't think you can have it both ways." "That seems to be less important in organizations now." "Do your values allow you to meet your needs?" "What impact do your values have on your thoughts/feelings/actions?" "The feedback indicates that a lot of managers don't walk the talk." "Your values seem to clash with those of other team members."</p>
Suggesting More Viable Values	<p>"One approach might be to place more emphasis on cooperation." "I think creating a greater sense of employee ownership would help morale." "Maybe it's time to place a higher priority on gender equity." "There would be some real benefits to becoming more customer-focused."</p>

Table 5
Interventions Aimed At Behavior

Clarifying Behavior	<p>"How could you go about doing that?" "What's the first step?" "How could you develop a plan of action?" "Those sound like good ideas, what else could you try?" "What could you say to him" "Why don't we role play that." "After that, what could you do?" "We've talked about how much this situation bothers you. Now let's talk about how you can change it." "How could you go about resolving this conflict?" "You know where you want to go; how can you get there?"</p>
Challenging Ineffective Behaviors	<p>"Do your actions allow you to meet your needs?" "What happened when you did that?" "I'm not sure that will work." "How effective was that?" "I think that would make the situation worse." "I'm not sure that would help you accomplish your goal." "In my experience that tends to put people on the defensive." "It seems to me that would be contrary to your value for. . ."</p>
Suggesting More Effective Behaviors	<p>"Another way of dealing with that would be to. . ." "It might be more effective if you. . ." "Perhaps you could try. . ." "An alternative way of responding would be to say. . ." "One way to build more team cohesiveness would be to. . ." "Perhaps it would help if you expressed more appreciation."</p>

To help you become more adept at developing strategies, here are some suggestions for dealing with the eight common causes of resistance discussed earlier:

1. They believe the change process is being handled improperly:

- a. Explain how the change will effect them.
- b. Ask for and listen to their concerns.
- c. Apologize for mistakes, or the issue will never go away.
- d. Provide additional information (not excuses), as needed.
- e. Ask for suggestions, in order to avoid similar situations in the future.
- f. Be honest about suggestions you can and cannot accept, and indicate why. People appreciate a straight answer.
- g. Follow through on agreements reached to improve the situation. If people believe they've been given the brush off, it will make things much worse.

2. They believe there isn't any need for the change:

- a. Explain why the change is necessary.
- b. Provide facts about the current challenges confronting the organization.
- c. Explain how the change will help the organization survive and grow.
- d. Listen and respond to their issues and concerns.

- e. Clarify misconceptions about the change.
- f. Indicate how the change will allow them to meet their needs more effectively.
- g. Determine if they're setting their sights too low.
- h. Discover if they're holding back due to fear of losing something.
- i. Appeal to their sense of challenge.
- j. Ask for their support in making the change work.

3. They believe the change will make it harder for them to meet their needs:

- a. Discover if their facts are accurate and complete.
- b. Determine if their beliefs are based on accurate information.
- c. Provide additional information to correct mistaken or inaccurate beliefs.
- d. Offer more viable interpretations of the facts.
- e. Listen and express understanding.
- f. Ask them what positive results they think can come out of the change.
- g. Suggest ways you could make the change easier for them.
- h. Ask how you can help them implement the change.
- i. Ask for suggestions on how to make the change work better.
- j. Ask for alternatives to the change that might be more effective.
- k. Follow through on agreements reached to improve the situation.

4. They believe the costs outweigh the benefits:

- a. Ask them to discuss the costs.
- b. Determine if the costs are based on accurate information.
- c. Provide additional information to correct inaccurate or mistaken beliefs.
- d. Offer more viable interpretations of the facts.
- e. Listen and respond to their issues and concerns.
- f. Specify the material rewards (money, benefits, etc.) they will receive from the change.
- g. Point out how the benefits of the change relate to their values.
- h. Ask them if they can think of additional benefits.

5. They lack the ability to make the change:

- a. Ask them to express their concerns.
- b. Listen and respond with empathy.
- c. Convey a willingness to work with the person.
- d. Ask open questions to get at all relevant issues.
- e. Probe for unexpressed concerns and invite dialogue.
- f. Express confidence and reassurance.
- g. Offer encouragement and support.
- h. Make resources available (time, money, training, etc.).
- i. Offer coaching/mentoring.
- j. Follow-up on agreements.
- k. Provide feedback on progress.
- l. Keep channels of communication open.

6. They believe the change will fail:

- a. Ask for and listen to their concerns.

- b. Discover if their facts are accurate and complete.
- c. Determine if their beliefs are based on accurate information.
- d. Provide additional information to correct mistaken or inaccurate beliefs.
- e. Offer more viable interpretations of the facts.
- f. Ask for suggestions to help make the change successful.
- g. Ask for alternatives to the change that might be more effective.
- h. Ask how you can help them implement the change.
- i. Encourage them to visualize positive outcomes.
- j. Follow through on agreements reached to improve the situation.
- k. Ask for their support in making the change work.
- l. Express confidence in their ability to implement the change successfully.

7. They believe the change is inconsistent with their values:

- a. Ask them to describe the inconsistencies they see between the change and their values.
- b. Explore the inconsistencies to determine if they are perceived or real.
- c. If the inconsistencies are perceived but not real, provide additional information as needed.
- d. When the inconsistencies are real, acknowledge their concerns.
- e. Ask for suggestions on how the problem can be resolved.
- f. When possible, modify the change.
- g. If the change can't be modified, be honest about it and ask for cooperation.
- h. Build common ground.
- i. Point out the benefits of the change (there are often more benefits than people realize).
- j. Ask questions to determine if there are other issues involved, such as anxiety about the change or lack of confidence.
- k. Offer your help and support during the change process.

8. They believe those responsible for the change can't be trusted:

- a. Share information openly and directly.
- b. Invite discussion of trust issues.
- c. Listen and convey understanding.
- d. Take responsibility for mistakes.
- e. Walk the talk.
- f. Follow through on agreements.
- g. Resolve disagreements directly and in good faith.
- h. Seek win-win outcomes.
- i. Be consistent and sincere.
- j. Honor confidential information.
- k. Give others credit when it's due.
- l. Involve others in decisions affecting them.
- m. Avoid actions contributing to mistrust (gossip, blaming, etc.).
- n. Act out of integrity and not expediency.
- o. Ask how a climate of trust can be fostered and maintained.

D. Implement The Strategy. In implementing a strategy, the two most important factors are *timing* and *pacing*. Timing has to do with when you implement the strategy.

An adequate strategy may intensify resistance simply because it was introduced at the wrong time. On-going communication and feedback will help you determine the best time to implement a change.

Pacing, which is related to timing, concerns how much of your strategy to introduce at any given time. Even people receptive to change have limits to how much they can handle, since any change involves adjustment. If you push people, you could inadvertently create resistance which wasn't there. In their research, Kotter and Heskitt (1992) found that adaptive organizations focused on making incremental changes. Avoid defeating yourself by going too fast. If people show signs of anxiety, stress, or resentment, take a look at the pace of change. Since people will respond differently to your strategy, you may need to go slower with some of them. Also some people require a great deal of reassurance during times of change, while others don't seem to need any at all. Allowing for individual differences and modifying the pace accordingly will enhance the effectiveness of your strategy.

E. Evaluate The Results of Your Strategy. Evaluating the effectiveness of your strategy is important in successfully dealing with resistance. Evaluation is not a one-time procedure which is completed after the strategy has been implemented. Rather, it is an ongoing process which begins from the moment you start implementing your strategy and continues until the resistance is reduced or eliminated. Throughout the implementation phase, what people do and say will tell you whether or not your strategy is working. Sometimes your attempts to deal with resistance will lead to dramatic results which are clearly positive or negative, but more often the results will show up in small changes. In their zeal to lower resistance, some people overlook or play down small changes, or even abandon good strategies if they don't meet with immediate success.

You can avoid this mistake by keeping in mind that even small change in beliefs, values, or behavior can be a significant sign that your strategy is working. Since these elements are interrelated, a tiny change may signify the beginning of a process which eventually yields tremendous results. Therefore notice *any* positive changes, regardless of magnitude, and nurture them to the fullest.

F. Repeat Steps A Through E, As Required. Since any strategy is a hypothesis about how to lower resistance, you won't know if it's working until you begin implementing it. The results of your ongoing evaluation will tell you if you need to modify your approach. Rarely will you be able to develop and implement a strategy without making adjustments. Be prepared to encounter obstacles and to deal with them as needed. Some common mistakes are:

1. Incorrectly assessing resistance.
2. Basing your strategy on a symptom rather than on a cause of resistance.
3. Failing to consider all relevant factors in developing the strategy.
4. Implementing a strategy not well suited to the situation.
5. Failing to adjust the strategy to account for new information.
6. Implementing the strategy at the wrong time or at an unrealistic pace.

In addition, your strategy may have unanticipated consequences. It could backfire, causing more problems than you had originally. The cause of resistance may

change in the middle of implementing your strategy, or people may respond with unanticipated counter measures. When faced with setbacks, therefore, repeat steps A through E as often as necessary to accomplish your objective. The biggest mistake is to stubbornly stick with a strategy, even when it's not working. You won't be able to overcome resistance in others if you resist changing an ineffective strategy!

Two steps forward, one step back. Change and resistance—the ebb and flow of organizational life. Change is necessary for survival and growth, but change brings risks, and with risks, resistance. Managing change and resistance are essential skills in today's increasingly complex and competitive world. By implementing the concepts and techniques presented in this article, you can help your organization carve out a path to a successful future.

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About the Author

Ken Hultman, Ed.D., received his doctorate in counseling psychology from Rutgers University and has over 40 years of experience as an organization development consultant, trainer, and coach. He is the author of six scholarly books, including *Making Change Irresistible: Overcoming Resistance to Change in Your Organization* (Davies-Black, 1998), *Balancing Individual and Organizational Values: Walking the Tightrope to Success* (Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, 2001), *Values-Driven Change: Strategies and Tools for Long-Term Success* (iUniverse, 2007), *Becoming a Genuine Giver: Overcoming Relationship Barriers* (Trafford, 2007), and *Becoming a Person of Destiny: Discovering and Fulfilling Your Life's Purpose* (Trafford, 2012). Ken's article, "Evaluating Organizational Values," received the 2005 Organization Development Journal outstanding article award. In addition his 2003 article, "Managing Resistance to Change," is downloaded on-line between 10-20 times daily by professionals worldwide. Ken is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and an approved LCPC supervisor.