

## Presenting Issue:

The speed with which an organization can change is as much a competitive advantage as best in class manufacturing operations or world class supply chain processes. How quickly an organization assimilates change is a distinctive competence in today's market place.

A number of variables influence the speed of organizational change. One of the key ones is organizational/individual resistance. **Managing resistance effectively is paramount to accelerating change adoption and project implementation -- i.e., moving well beyond merely coping with change.** As the pace of change continues to accelerate, it's obvious that managing resistance is a greater challenge and a more critical organizational skill.

Ineffective resistance management slows down, and sometimes derails, implementation efforts. Approaches such as discounting resistance, denying it exists, or trying to beat it down, paradoxically exacerbate resistance and thus increase the organizational/personal costs of the change.

The impact of unmanaged resistance is clear -- implementation efforts are more likely to be over budget, behind schedule, and not to expected specification. In other words, “you don't get the change you thought you needed.”

Though resistance is inevitable, it neither has to be interminable nor a barrier to implementation. Indeed, it can be a solution and not just a nagging problem. Purposefully managing resistance increases communication, promotes genuine involvement, builds resiliency, and creates opportunity for buy-in to occur. It's an essential and high impact tactic for accelerating change.

## What's to be done?

Resistance management has two paths -- systemic and transactional. The former consist of the purposeful and strategic approach that guides intervention at the organizational level. It's the accepted frame of reference for how resistance is be viewed and attended to. The

latter, is the one-on-one, eye-ball to eye-ball interaction with a resistor. It's the personal, emotional, and personalized dialogue about the source of, and solution to, one's reluctance to “get on board” with the change. Both paths are essential.

The systemic path is the one less traveled. Few implementation teams have the discipline to proactively consider the sources of resistance throughout the life of a change effort. Most, by default, are put in the position to at best react in fits and starts to the symptoms of resistance, but seldom to its sources. Meanwhile, the transactional path suffers from travelers who simply do not have the interpersonal awareness, social skills, patience, or empathy, to work with resisters.

## Systemic Intervention:

Effective change teams (i.e., those that are likely to implement on time, within budget, and to expected requirements) operate with a robust Resistance Management Plan. Indeed, the plan is treated as a project management deliverable that tracks implementation risk across the life of the project. The plan consists of an articulation of a set of realistic assumptions of what resistance is and how it will be managed. It contains a key stakeholder analysis assessing change readiness. And, it includes a tactical component for assuring that change leaders (i.e., sponsors) and agents have the capacity to leverage face-to-face opportunities with resisters.

In terms of underlying assumptions, IMA's *Accelerated Implementation Methodology*, (**AIM**), provides a clear contrast between effective and ineffective frames of reference re resistance<sup>1</sup>. Some of the contrasts are summarized in the table on the next page.

<sup>1</sup> For a full description of **AIM** visit [imaworldwide.com/methodology](http://imaworldwide.com/methodology).



## RESISTANCE<sup>1</sup>

IS	IS NOT
Inevitable	Necessarily logical
A natural function of change	A sign of disloyalty
Manageable	Something to overcome or combat
An attempt to protect the individual frame of reference	Aimed at you or to be taken personally
A sign that the potential for change exists	Indicative of poor performance
A process	Not an event

Organizations or change teams that operate from the “IS NOT” perspective will deploy a combative, “fighting fire with fire” approach to resistance. Ironically, it’s a strategy which serves to intensify rather than mitigate employee reluctance to change.

Stakeholder plans are common in project charters. However, in terms of implementation we need a stakeholder analysis that identifies the likely behavioral impacts upon key individuals or groups whose acceptance of the change is critical to accelerating implementation. Moreover, the analyses should include commitment requirements, disruptions levels, and expected sources of resistance. Finally, there must be a strategy to source the actual resistance.

Lastly, the Resistance Management Plan should consider the readiness capacity of sponsors and agents to actually engage resistors. Development efforts, based upon an assessment of skill gaps, should be incorporated and resourced. And, resistance mitigation tactics should be purposefully considered in all communication, reinforcement, and involvement efforts.

### Transactional Approach:

The systemic intervention creates the structure and establishes the overall temperament for engaging resistance. However, resistance cannot be managed as a group event. Change, after all, is experienced individually. Thus the systemic approach must be accompanied by the one-on-one encounters or small group meetings. It is in these more intimate settings that individual frames of reference can be understood and validated. Here, resistors obtain the self-awareness that leads to owning one’s own resistance.

<sup>2</sup> IMA, Inc., *AIM* Manual, 2008, page 51.

That is the goal -- having individuals take personal responsibility for adapting to the change.

The basic approach, either in the one-one-setting or small group session, is outlined in the guide below.

1. Surface it ... ask for it
2. Listen ... acknowledge it
3. Pin point the source– what is it?
4. “Name that Resistance” ... put it in words using neutral language<sup>3</sup>
5. Call for action -- help them take responsibility for the part they control.<sup>4</sup>

These conversations revolve around understanding the resistor’s frame of reference from three key perspectives: (1) the disruption caused by the change; (2) their motivation to change; and (3) the source of any resistance.

### Conclusion:

Whether a change is perceived as negative or positive, reluctance to change is inevitable. It’s not all bad -- take advantage of its good side. It’s helpful and necessary project feedback. However, you must work with it - it’s not something you overcome or beat down, nor is it ever solved. Remember, people will resist not only the content of the change, but also the method of the change. And as counter-intuitive as it might seem, overt resistance is better than covert -- because if you can’t see it, you can’t manage it. Lastly, reward (don’t shoot) the messenger. No retribution for diverse opinions, o.k.?

<sup>3</sup> Block, Peter. *Flawless Consulting 2<sup>nd</sup>*, Edition, Jossey-Bass, 2000, pg.163.

<sup>4</sup> For a more complete description visit [imaworldwide.com/aimexchange/documents](http://imaworldwide.com/aimexchange/documents).

