RE-THINKING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE
You Can’t Eliminate Resistance

Resistance to change is one of the most misunderstood concepts in management today. Untold time and energy is being spent in useless, and even undesirable attempts to eliminate resistance. But resistance can’t be:

- Overcome,
- Combatted, or
- Eliminated.

In fact, resistance may actually be a sign of organizational health!

In this ebook, we’ll discuss what resistance is, what it isn’t, and what you can do to manage it. We’ll share some tactics and strategies you can apply right now.
### The CAST of Characters: Key Roles in Implementing Changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>C</strong> Champions</td>
<td>Believe in the change and attempt to obtain commitment and resources for it</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong> Agents</td>
<td>Implement change. Performance is evaluated based on implementation success</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>S</strong> Sponsors</td>
<td>Authorize, legitimize and demonstrate ownership for the change (Authorize and Reinforce)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T</strong> Targets</td>
<td>Change behavior, processes, knowledge, perceptions, etc.</td>
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**Sponsorship is the single most important factor in ensuring fast and successful implementation.**
DISRUPTION

NEGATIVE

CHANGE

POSITIVE

CHANGE

GENERATES

RESISTANCE

GENERATES
What is Resistance?

Resistance is simply an attempt to defend a current “Frame of Reference.” Your Frame of Reference is your world-view; your perspective. Your organizational Frame of Reference is also known as your culture.

Resistance isn’t logical.

If it was, everyone would be skinny, and no one would smoke! We know that we should eat a healthy diet, and that cigarettes can cause cancer—but does that stop us from doing these things?

Oh no—because it’s not about logic! We protect our habits and patterns, and we won’t change them just because we see and hear messages that these habits aren’t good for us.

Resistance is actually a function of disruption. The more that the Targets of the change believe that their current work habits and patterns will be impacted, the greater the degree of resistance will be.
Positive Changes Generate Resistance

So it doesn’t matter if your change is “positive” or “negative”—you will still be faced with resistance. Resistance isn’t generated by whether or not people like your change—it’s caused by the degree of disruption to habit patterns.

Remember, too, that what is positive to senior management may not be positive to the Targets. Even cutting-edge technology and simplified processes that are considered positive changes will generate resistance!

If you’re staying up nights trying to find the one perfect argument that will make everyone like your change, go back to sleep! You can’t communicate your way to eliminating resistance.

Bottom-line: A communication plan is not an implementation plan.
Resistance Slows Down Implementations

So what’s the risk?

If resistance isn’t identified, and is left unmanaged, it slows down the implementation. Implementation success is based on two major factors:

- **Implementation Climate**…
  That’s driven by the past patterns of implementation and the number of competing priorities going on at the same time. *(No change occurs in isolation, it occurs in the context of all the other things competing for resources at the same time.)*

- **Organizational Readiness**…
  Driven by the capacity of Sponsors to lead the change by what they express, model, and reinforce; the readiness of the Targets, how consistent the change is with the culture, and the capacity of Agents to implement the change at the local level.
Frames of Reference About Resistance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESISTANCE IS</th>
<th>RESISTANCE IS NOT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Inevitable</td>
<td>• Necessarily logical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A natural function of change</td>
<td>• A sign of disloyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Manageable</td>
<td>• Something to overcome or combat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• An attempt to protect the individual FOR</td>
<td>• Aimed at you to be taken personally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A sign that you have touched on something important</td>
<td>• Designed to discredit your competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A sign that potential for change exists</td>
<td>• Indicative of poor performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A sign of controlling the change process</td>
<td>• A sign that the change process is out of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A learning process</td>
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It’s Not Good News if You Don’t See Resistance to Your Change

If you can’t find any resistance, it means one of two things:

1. Nobody’s changing
2. The resistance has gone underground (If you meet the resistance with force, you’ll drive it underground.)

In either case, it’s not good news!
Instead, Go to the Resistance Early

There is value in resistance—it’s a natural function of the change process.

Innovation and resistance are two sides of the same coin. An innovative organization isn’t resistance-free. It’s resistance-laden.

A sign of an “engaged” organization is an organization where people feel free to resist!

Listen to the resistance. It tests your change.

Resistance is actually a sign of organizational health!
The Sources of Resistance Can Be Individual or Organizational

We teach people that it is okay to express their individual resistance in the form of organizational resistance:

- **Logistics**: “We don’t have the time…”
- **Economics**: “We don’t have the budget…”
- **Politics**: “We don’t have the right people…”

You have to uncover the real source of the resistance, because it’s constantly masquerading as something else.
Resistance Can Look Like Something It Isn’t

Here are some examples of the characteristics of resistance that underscore why things may not be as they seem:

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<tr>
<th>What’s Observable</th>
<th>What’s Really Going On</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ability (I lack the skills)</td>
<td>Willingness (I’m not motivated, so training won’t make it better)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overt (I express my resistance)</td>
<td>Covert (It looks like I’m changing but I’m really not)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action (I’m busy changing)</td>
<td>Inaction (If I just wait, this too will pass)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscious (My actions demonstrate my resistance)</td>
<td>Unconscious (I don’t realize I’m being resistant)</td>
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We teach people in what ways demonstrating resistance is culturally acceptable. You’ll likely find every permutation and combination of resistance in your organization.

Remember that the pain of uncertainty is greater than the certainty of pain!
You Can Predict the Levels of Resistance

You can’t simply assess the levels of resistance based on whether you believe a change is positive or negative, or what you are seeing, but you can predict the impact the change will have by putting yourself in the Targets’ Frame of Reference and asking the following questions:

From the Targets’ Frame of Reference, Does This Implementation

1. Have Low Perceived Need
2. Have Unclear Expectations
3. Have Unknown Outcomes
4. Have Negative Impacts
5. Seem Irreversible
6. Have Low Reward and High Cost
7. Cause a High Level of Disruption
8. Have Low Involvement
9. Imply Poor Past Performance

Imply Poor Past Performance
It’s Important to “Surface” the Resistance Early!

While resistance isn’t necessarily bad, what is problematic is resistance that has gone underground. Use these techniques to surface the resistance. It’s helpful to use multiple techniques.

- Surveys
- Interviews
- Third party interviews
- Blogs
- Social network media
- FAQ sheets
- Focus groups
- Hot lines
- Voicemail
- E-mail
- “All hands” meeting/town forum
- Team meetings
- Q&A sheets
- Webcasts
9 Effective Behaviors for Managing Resistance

Once the resistance is surfaced, and you understand it from the Targets’ Frame of Reference, you can use these behaviors to manage it:

1. Creating rapport
2. Establishing expectations
3. Realizing that you are dealing with resistance after two “good faith” attempts to explain the change
4. Explaining the change in a way that demonstrates you understand the Targets’ Frame of Reference
5. Asking open-ended questions
6. After the “why’s” are agreed on, focus on “what we can do to work it out”
7. Occupying less than 25% of the air time (listen and be quiet!)
8. Utilizing the Target’s energy to manage the situation
9. Creating win-win situations
These Behaviors are Ineffective!

1. Attempting to beat the Target into submission with logical arguments
2. Dealing with the person, not the issue
3. Ignoring the Target’s values, emotions, and behaviors
4. Dragging out the “hammer” (to beat the Target into submission)
5. Trying to combat, solve, or overcome the resistance
6. Assuming what is logical to you is logical to the Target
7. Arguing with the Target while s/he states their perceptions
8. Giving up
Use Involvement to Build Readiness for Change

Involvement leads to higher-level feelings of control!

If you can’t get people involved in deciding **what to change**, get them involved in **how to change**.
Tactics for Managing Resistance

- Communication should be cyclical and iterative and each vehicle should have a feedback loop to surface resistance.
- Surface resistance early and manage it.
- Involve Targets as much and as early as possible to minimize uncertainty.
- Communicate the project in the Target’s FOR and minimize strategic jargon. Focus on “What’s in it for me?” and “What does it mean to me?”
- Identify cynics or vocal non-supporters and involve them in key roles.
- Make surfacing resistance safe and keep it overt.
- Provide continuous, multiple vehicles for surfacing resistance over the full cycle of the change.
A Structured Framework Brings Rigor to the People-Side of Projects

The *Accelerating Implementation Methodology (AIM)* is a set of strategies, tactics, principles, and tools that can be applied to any change, including transformational change. It provides the same level of rigor and business discipline to the human elements of change as are applied to operational and financial areas of the business.

AIM drives business value in several ways:

1. A standard language and approach for implementation is *more efficient* and drives *speed*

2. The methodology and its measurement tools serve as a risk dashboard that informs the leadership team *where finite resources are best applied* (Your organization will never have the level of resources you need for your projects)

3. The methodology is *extremely practical and operationally-focused* on securing the desired business outcomes; we like to say it is not “a group hug”

4. The methodology is both *systemic and systematic*—it provides a unifying foundation for managing the change across organizational boundaries, cultures, and geographies
Learn More about AIM and Transformational Change

**Tips for Managing Resistance to Change:** a one hour recorded webinar led by Don Harrison, IMA President and Founder

**Leading People Through Business Changes:** a white paper describing the Accelerating Implementation Methodology (AIM) from an application perspective

**Schedule a private web meeting** on AIM and how it can be applied to your transformational and other changes

IMA is an international consulting firm that guides organizations through all types of large-scale change and implementations. Since 1989, our proprietary and systematic *Accelerating Implementation Methodology* (**AIM**) has been used extensively for the successful implementation of a wide variety of business-critical change projects.

We work with clients in four major ways:

- **Action Learning Programs**, designed to train your people in the principles, tools, and deliverables of **AIM**

- **Consulting**, where we work with your project teams to mentor them in application of **AIM**

- **Measurement**, using our toolkit of validated diagnostic assessments

- **Methodology Transfer**, our Accreditation process for building internal **AIM** Practitioners
Application of **AIM** is proven to deliver business change initiatives:

**On Time:** In most industries, being first to market results in making 4 to 10 times more profit than your competitors. Making decisions and implementing quickly is critical. **AIM** can help you meet or beat your schedule.

**Within Budget:** Change is a ferocious, resource consuming activity. The more quickly and efficiently an organization can implement change, the more resources it has available for other strategic initiatives. Effective use of **AIM** can significantly increase the probability of implementation success within budget.

**All Objectives Met:** Most large-scale change initiatives fail to fully meet the technical, business and human objectives, thereby missing the mark on anticipated ROI. **AIM** provides a framework that drives comprehensive change, speeds implementation, and helps ensure short and long-term business results.

For more information, contact [info@imaworldwide.com](mailto:info@imaworldwide.com) or call 800.752.9254 or +1.303.996.7777