

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT RESISTANCE

Misconception	Why it's wrong	A more effective practitioner view
Resistance is something that may or may not exist during major initiatives.	Because significant change always disrupts expectations to some extent (and therefore there is always some degree of feeling loss of control), the only option is how resistance is expressed, not whether it exists.	Help clients grasp the inevitable nature of resistance so they can make a decision about whether to try to encourage overt expressions of target fears and trepidations or leave these concerns to go underground and possibly fester into more difficult challenges.
Resistance is a sign that something is wrong—it should be avoided.	Actually, it's a natural and inevitable response to feeling loss of control. Its occurrence doesn't mean that something is amiss; it indicates that people are no longer able to operate as they had expected and, consequently, are uncomfortable.	Change agents should never encourage resistance; instead, they should reinforce the expression of the resistance that exists. Help create environments and forums where leaders can convey how important it is that people openly state their questions and concerns. Ensure that this is not done in order to "vent targets' apprehensions" but is seen as a vehicle for leaders to fully comprehend the prevailing target perceptions and to make informed decisions about how to respond.
Engaging people in the change process will eliminate resistance.	Involving targets in as much of the preliminary discussions, decision making, and planning as possible is a vital component to gaining their support. It is a mistake, however, to think this will eradicate resistance altogether. First, participation does not always result in agreement with leadership's views of what needs to happen or how it should unfold. But beyond that, even when targets contribute to the process and endorse what is planned, they still are likely to become disillusioned at some point when less is accomplished than expected or the road to success becomes harder than anticipated.	Guide clients toward seeing resistance not as something to get rid of, but as something to help surface and leverage as a key commitment-building asset.
If a change isn't expensive, it won't have much impact on the people.	Many people view a transition as significant only if it involves a great deal of money, yet funding has proven to be a poor indicator of how people interpret the impact of initiatives. An organization can spend millions of dollars upgrading its technology, and yet the new system is so consistent with what employees were expecting and prepared for that the change causes only slight alterations in how they anticipated operating. From a human experience standpoint, this makes it a minor change. On the other hand, an initiative involving little expense, such as shifting how key decisions are made, can produce a cultural explosion—"That's not the way we do things around here."	Help clients understand that deciding whether a change is relevant and substantial (or not) depends on the target's perspective. Regardless of how much money is involved, targets will react to change as a big deal to the extent 1) it involves issues/circumstances they care about, and 2) what is unfolding does not match with what they anticipated would happen.
Resistance happens when people don't like what is	If this were true, then the events in our lives we consider positive, such as earning a college degree, getting married, or being promoted, would require only minor adjustments. Such is not the case for most people. The	Help clients understand that just as much resistance will come from targets who

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happening.	degree, the marriage, and the promotion are powerful motivators as we strive toward them, and joyful occasions when they take place, but most of us soon find that these auspicious events create hidden problems to which we have to adjust. People have to accommodate even favorable changes because they have to recalibrate their expectations to match what is really happening. In fact, some of the strongest resistance occurs when people get exactly what they asked for—if what they wanted causes a significant departure from their expectations.	support a change (or even asked for it) as from those who were immediately upset by the change. The issue isn't whether people like what is happening—it's to what degree their expectations are being disrupted.
With proper implementation planning and execution, it is possible to fully prepare people for change.	If change occurs because expectations fail to correspond to perceived reality, then an inherent characteristic of the transition process is the “surprise factor.” Change is, by definition, about being surprised. There is a double whammy, however, when people feel surprised at being startled, if not shocked, by unheralded circumstances. Not only are they taken back by the unexpected, they didn't know unexpected things were likely to happen. They were lulled into thinking they were fully prepared for the change. People feel the most vulnerable when they are surprised at being surprised—when they suddenly realize that even though they felt prepared for an impending major change, they are actually ill-equipped for what is happening.	When facilitating major change, it is impossible to totally prepare clients for what they will experience. It is best to help them anticipate as much as can be determined ahead of time and then help them see that there will be even more adjustments (positive and negative) than can be seen currently.
If, after explaining to targets the rationale for the change, they still don't get on board, the only way to deal with the resistance is to overpower it.	There is a time when sponsors should pull out all the stops and exercise the full range of negative reinforcements at their disposal to ensure sufficient support, but that shouldn't be the first choice. Prior to coming down hard, it's important to diagnose the underlying cause of the reluctance and determine the proper mitigation strategy.	The amount of resistance generated is a function of the degree of disruption a person faces and his or her ability and willingness to deal with it. Ability deficiencies can be addressed with training and/or coaching. Willingness deficiencies are more suitable for consequence management—both positive and negative. When negative consequences are part of the mix, it tends to be more effective to gradually escalate them in order to find the level that is meaningful for the targets instead of using excessive force and triggering counterproductive ramifications.
If resistance does arise, it is faster and consumes fewer resources to just force the change through and then come back later to deal with the aftermath.	Just as there is no question as to whether resistance will be a factor during major change, there is no question about whether it is expressed. The only issue is whether it will be done covertly (underground, behind the scenes where leadership has little chance to understand the concerns, much less effectively mitigate them) or overtly (open forums, small-group or one-on-one dialogues characterized by high candor and little posturing). Given this, leaders have no choice about <i>whether</i> to pay for resistance—they just have to decide <i>how much</i> and <i>when</i> : Paying up front to minimize unnecessary resistance means establishing trust and creating opportunities people will take advantage of to freely express how they	Guide clients toward making an informed decision based on an understanding that they will pay dearly for resistance one way or the other. They will either pay the price to minimize it or pay the price to heal from it, but they will pay. Although both invoices are substantial, generally

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	<p>feel about the change. This is very costly to do. Paying after the fact means engaging in a recovery process to mend trust and credibility fractures that have already occurred. This is also very costly.</p>		<p>speaking, <i>healing</i> payments are higher and longer term than <i>prevention</i> payments.</p>
<p>As practitioners, we are immune to resistance...that's what other people do.</p>	<p>When we decide to oppose something, it is based on logical thought and sound judgment. When others fail to support our views, they are "resisting"...usually because they are "ignorant of the facts," "not thinking rationally," or "just being obstinate."</p>	<p>See the double standard for what it is. It is difficult to see ourselves objectively when we are in the midst of the pressures and challenges of facilitating major change. In reality, when clients push back against things we are promoting, it is seldom because they are ignorant, illogical, or malicious. Generally, they do so because they are human and extremely uncomfortable with situations that disrupt their expectations. What we need to remember is that not only is the change people are dealing with disruptive to their expectations, so are our methods and processes for managing the implementation.</p>	