**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 resistors.

**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 resistors.

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

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1 For a full description of *AIM* visit imaworldwide.com/methodology.
“The only person who likes change is a wet baby.” R. Blitzer

Managing Resistance to Change

**RESISTANCE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IS</th>
<th>IS NOT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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 frame of reference</td>
<td>Aimed at you or to be taken personally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sign that the potential for change exists</td>
<td>Indicative of poor performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A process</td>
<td>Not an event</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
5. Call for action -- help them take responsibility for the part they control.

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.?

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4 For a more complete description visit imaworldwide.com/aimexchange/documents.