

# MANAGING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Executive Summary

# INTRODUCTION

In times of change, resistance can be expected. It is a natural, psychological and physiological reaction to change. As one study participant observed, “Resistance is a natural reaction to a change in environment.” While some contemporary literature suggests a more positive focus on resilience instead of resistance, to pretend resistance does not occur is detrimental to initiatives and to employees. Actively managing and mitigating resistance is a key part of change management, especially when employed alongside proactive steps to build awareness, adoption and proficiency.

Prosci embarked on a targeted research effort to add depth and breadth to the body of knowledge related to managing resistance to change. This effort adds to existing research in the field by diving deeper into particular facets of resistance management. The objective is to provide lessons learned and actionable insights for change practitioners around the world.

The report includes insights from 825 change practitioners and includes five sections of unique content. The first section explores **Keys to Resistance Management** and includes the top tactics for managing three types of resistance: active, passive and individual. **Planning for Resistance Management**, the second section, looks at the steps taken to anticipate and proactively address resistance, including resource allocations. The third section focuses on **Addressing Resistance** with practical tips for identifying and responding to resistance in a structured way. Some resistance occurs as an informed disagreement with the change which results in a reexamination of the change itself, and this phenomenon is explored in the fourth section on **Constructive Resistance**. The report concludes by exploring the relationship between **Resistance and Saturation**.

The resulting benchmarking report includes rich insights and direction for change practitioners working to overcome resistance and deliver change outcomes. Some of the findings may validate a practitioner’s beliefs and experiences, while others may extend and enrich the practice. Collectively, these findings provide a foundation for more successful change and employee engagement.

# KEYS TO RESISTANCE MANAGEMENT

This section explores the key factors to successfully manage resistance. Participants identified the greatest contributors to overcoming active, passive and individual resistance. Engaging the executive sponsor was the top contributor to success for active resistance. Across all three types of resistance, participants highlighted the importance of transparent, open, and honest communication. Participants reported that ineffective leadership, intensity of resistance, unsupportive managers, ineffective leadership alignment with the change team and lack of organizational readiness were all obstacles that could lead to ineffective resistance management.

## ***Findings in this section:***

- Greatest contributors to overcoming active resistance
- Greatest contributors to overcoming passive resistance
- Greatest contributors to overcoming individual resistance
- Largest obstacles to overcoming resistance
- What to do differently when overcoming resistance

*“Setting up one-on-one time to allow the individual to voice their concerns, ask questions and to be sure that they were well equipped to adopt the change.”*



**GREATEST  
CONTRIBUTORS TO  
OVERCOMING ACTIVE  
RESISTANCE**

**FINDINGS EXCERPT**

Participants identified the greatest contributors to overcoming active resistance to a project:

**1. Engaging executive sponsorship**

- Communicating about the change throughout the project
- Actively supporting the change through early adoption
- Vocally supporting the project
- Directly addressing resistance
- Lending authority to the change manager

**2. Communicating proactively**

- One-on-one and face-to-face
- Incorporating active feedback
- Constant and consistent
- From the top down

**3. Identifying and confronting directly**

**4. Equipping and enabling managers and supervisors to address resistance**

**5. Involving resisters in project or solution design**

“

*Formally charge them with the [project's] success; then, inform their supervisor of the expected deliverable and timeline.*

**GREATEST  
CONTRIBUTORS TO  
OVERCOMING PASSIVE  
RESISTANCE**

FINDINGS EXCERPT

Participants identified the single greatest contributor to overcoming passive resistance to a change initiative:

- 1. Communicating transparently, openly, and honestly**
- 2. Using positive peer influence and change agent networks**
- 3. Inviting participation in solution**
- 4. Enlisting leadership support**

..... “ .....

*Showing your human side through listening and being empathic.  
Then working directly with those affected to support them  
through the transition.*

**WHAT TO DO  
DIFFERENTLY WHEN  
OVERCOMING  
RESISTANCE**

FINDINGS EXCERPT

Participants identified what they would do differently next time when overcoming resistance. Most responses suggested that they had underestimated the amount, intensity, resource requirements, and support needed to address resistance to a change project. Participant responses included:

- 1. Start earlier**
- 2. Enlist committed and competent sponsor support before a project begins**
- 3. Engage middle managers and supervisors from the beginning**

#### 4. Create a robust and structured resistance plan

- Identifying impacted groups and stakeholders
- Training managers and supervisors to address resisters
- Assessing potential sources of resistance
- Gathering change agents to act as peer leaders
- Obtaining executive buy-in to address resistance and ensure that resources are allocated to manage resistance

#### 5. Communicate more

“

*Communicate directly – early and often with leaders within organizational business units and their direct business owner.*

# PLANNING FOR RESISTANCE MANAGEMENT

This section explores the approach to proactively planning to address resistance. Over four out of five participants, 83%, reported creating plans to address resistance as part of their overall change management plan. Those who did proactively plan to address resistance were significantly more likely to meet objectives than those who did not. When planning ahead for resistance management, exceptional communication and active engagement with sponsors were the most common tactics. A smaller but still significant percentage of participants, 66%, reported allocating resources during planning to address resistance. The most commonly identified anticipated resistance were lacking faith in the new solution and actively sabotaging or withdrawing from the change.

## ***Findings in this section:***

- Prevalence of early planning for resistance management
- Impact of planning for resistance on success
- Tactics used when planning to address resistance
- Resistance anticipated during planning
- Allocating resources for anticipated resistance
- Impact of resource allocation on success

*“We first acknowledged that change resistance is a predictable dynamic of change...once we had an understanding of why they were resisting, we set out to help the employees manage the resistance.”*



# ADDRESSING RESISTANCE

This section explores how participants identified resistance, what types of resistance they experienced and the impact that following a structured approach to managing resistance had on their project success. Study participants indicated the specific behaviors they observed to identify resistance such as attrition, complaints, disengagement, mistakes, pushback, and strong reactions. Forty percent of participants followed a structured approach for addressing resistance.

## ***Findings in this section:***

- How participants identified resistance
- Using a structured process for addressing resistance
- Impact of using a structured process for addressing resistance on success
- Types of resistance experienced
- Indexing resistance types by region and industry

*“Lack of response, statements to the effect of not wanting to pay for it and pushing to use an outdated system.”*



**TYPES OF RESISTANCE EXPERIENCED**

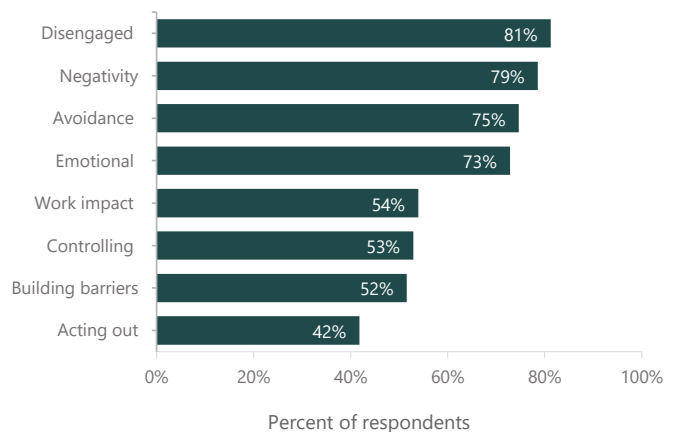
**FINDINGS EXCERPT**

Participants identified the types of resistance they experienced during their projects, based on the following descriptions of each type of resistance:

- **Emotional** – fear, loss, sadness, anger, anxiety, frustration, depression, and focusing on self
- **Disengaged** – quiet, avoidance, ignoring communications, indifference, apathy, and low morale
- **Work impact** – reduced productivity/efficiency, non-compliance, absenteeism, and mistakes
- **Acting out** – conflict, overbearing, arguments, sabotage, aggressive, passive-aggressive, and celebrate failure
- **Negativity** – rumors/gossip, miscommunication, objections, complaining, sarcasm, and focusing on problems
- **Avoidance** – ignoring change, reverting to old behaviors, workarounds, and abdicating responsibilities
- **Building barriers** – excuses, counter-approaches, recruiting dissenters, secrecy, breakdown of trusts
- **Controlling** – asking many questions, influencing outcomes, defending the current state, using status

Most respondents reported experiencing Disengagement (81%), Negativity (79%), Avoidance (75%), and Emotional (73%) resistance types. About half reported experiencing Work Impact (54%), Controlling (53%), and Building Barriers (52%) types of resistance. Less than half of respondents reported experiencing the Acting Out (42%) type of resistance.

**Figure 15 - Types of resistance experienced**



\*Editor's note – Respondents were able to select more than one option, and therefore responses sum to more than 100%.

# CONSTRUCTIVE RESISTANCE

This section explores the concept of constructive resistance. Constructive resistance was defined as “resistance caused by design, execution, or implementation issues that required reevaluation on the project side.” This type of resistance was studied because it is different than resistance stemming from a poorly managed change; it stems from the actual content of the technical side of the change. Participants reported that the most effective way to identify constructive resistance was when resisters could clearly and effectively communicate their issues with the change. Once resistance was successfully identified as constructive, participants used the resistance to reevaluate project details, escalate concerns to leadership, and reevaluate the solution design of the project.

## ***Findings in this section:***

- Prevalence of constructive resistance
- Identifying constructive resistance
- Acting on constructive resistance

*“The employees at issue were NOT change resistant in general; they merely resisted some particular changes – and, it turns out for good reason.”*



# RESISTANCE AND SATURATION



This section explores the impact that change saturation has on the type and severity of resistance to a project. Seventy-five percent of participants reported that their organization's level of change saturation impacted the resistance they experienced on the project. The most frequently reported impact of increased saturation was that both project-specific and non-project specific resistance increased, and as change saturation decreased in the organization the prevalence of each type of resistance decreased as well.



## ***Findings in this section:***

- Prevalence of change saturation that impacted resistance
- Impact of change saturation on resistance
- Change saturation on change types

*"People become change weary not only from going through the change but from the work that is involved to make the change happen. If more change = more work (while still doing their own job), then resistance to the change increases."*

**IMPACT OF CHANGE SATURATION ON RESISTANCE**

FINDINGS EXCERPT

Participants identified the impact that a high degree of change saturation had on the resistance they experienced:

- 1. Greater resistance**
- 2. Non-project-specific resistance**
- 3. No capacity to change**
- 4. More failed projects**
- 5. Exhausted and overwhelmed impacted groups**

..... “ .....  
*Communicate directly – early and often with leaders within organizational business units and their direct business owner.*

# CONCLUSION

Resistance is a real, expected occurrence when organizations implement change that impact how people do their jobs. While this resistance can be costly and impactful, it can be effectively planned for, addressed and mitigated. With diligent application of resistance-reducing strategies, a structured process, and a genuine desire to understand the root cause of resistance, it is possible to move past this natural reaction toward more effective adoption of change. Prosci's targeted research effort provided concrete tips and data to support change practitioners faced with managing resistance.



Purchase the full study to gain access to all the latest insights related to managing resistance to change.



## Why Prosci® Change Management training?

Whether you are new or experienced in the field of Change Management, Prosci will provide you with a structured approach to effectively manage the people side of change.

## What makes the Prosci Change Management approach unique?

- ▶ A holistic approach that integrates both the individual and organisational aspects of change
- ▶ A clear framework, effective for any type or size of change
- ▶ Practical, easy-to-use eToolkit for practitioners with tools, templates, assessments and checklists
- ▶ Contextualised training; assessing and building change management plan for real projects

\* Prosci's research has shown that projects with excellent change management are:

**93%** more likely to meet or exceed their objectives

**69%** more likely to be on schedule

**78%** more likely to be under budget

\* Prosci® Best Practice Research 2018

**A D K A R**

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The ADKAR Model is a framework for understanding change at an individual level.

The Model addresses each of the ADKAR factors: Awareness, Desire Knowledge, Ability and Reinforcement so that we can successfully employ it to facilitate individual change.

### Contact us

www.cmcpartnership.com  
changemanagement@cmcpartnership.com

## Why CMC, to help build your Change Management capability?

Owned and managed by Change Practitioners, CMC is licensed to deliver Prosci Change Management Training worldwide. Our courses are delivered by highly qualified instructors who also have practical experience in change, programme and project delivery.



CMC's Prosci Certification training has been approved by the Association of Change Management Professionals®

CMC offers a wide range of change management training, advisory and support to suit you and your organisations needs:

- ▶ *Prosci Change Management Practitioner Certification* course for change professionals
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- ▶ CMC is the sole provider of public training across the UK & Ireland, Italy and Singapore
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“It's been 3 days of light bulb moments!”

Rachel Vipond  
Portfolio Manager, Ishoni

## The Prosci Change Management Methodology

- Draws upon continual field research with more than 4.500 participants worldwide
- The most widely used change management methodology in the world
- Based on Prosci's 3-Phase Change Management Process as a leading framework for managing the people side of change:
  - Phase 1: Preparing for change
  - Phase 2: Managing change
  - Phase 3: Reinforcing change

