



# MANAGING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

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Resistance to change is normal and expected, but what if we could eliminate at least half of the resistance encountered on a change initiative?

At the formulation of the methodology in 2002, Prosci identified seven change concepts that make up the reality of change. These foundational concepts introduce the theories and perspectives of change and are central to the ultimate application of change management practices. One of them, “Resistance and Comfort,” recognizes that resistance is the natural reaction to change.

The question is not if we will encounter resistance to change, but rather how we support our employees through the change process and manage resistance to minimize the impact on employees and the organization.

## WHY RESISTANCE OCCURS

Change creates anxiety and fear. The current state has tremendous holding power, and the uncertainty of success and fear of the unknown can block change and create resistance. These physical and emotional reactions are powerful enough by themselves to create resistance to change. But there is more to resistance than our emotional response. From a change management perspective, we must examine the other drivers that influence an employee’s resistance to change. Other influencers include:

- The impact on their work
- The trustworthiness of people communicating the change
- Personal factors, including finances, age, health, mobility and family status
- The change’s alignment with their value system
- The organization’s history of handling change

Even when employees can align the change with their self-interest and belief system, the uncertainty of success and fear of the unknown remain significant barriers to change.

## WHAT DOES RESISTANCE TO CHANGE LOOK LIKE?

The definition of resistance is “the refusal to accept or comply with something; the attempt to prevent something by action or argument.” Prosci uses the word resistance to describe the physiological and psychological responses to change that manifest in specific behaviors. In a recent webinar on managing resistance, over 350 responses were provided to the question “What does resistance to change look like in your organization?” The responses were analyzed to produce the following categories of resistance:

1. Emotion – fear, loss, sadness, anger, anxiety, frustration, depression, focus on self
2. Disengagement – silence, avoidance, ignoring communications, indifference, apathy, low morale
3. Work impact – reduced productivity/efficiency, non-compliance, absenteeism, mistakes
4. Acting out – conflict, arguments, sabotage; overbearing, aggressive or passive/aggressive behavior
5. Negativity – rumors/gossip, miscommunication, complaining, focus on problems, celebrating failure
6. Avoidance – ignoring the change, reverting to old behaviors, workarounds, abdicating responsibilities
7. Building barriers – excuses, counter-approaches, recruiting dissenters, secrecy, breakdown in trust
8. Controlling – asking lots of questions, influencing outcomes, defending current state, using status

Just as change is individual – person-by-person – so is resistance to change. The root cause for one person’s resistance may not be the same as another person’s, considering factors such as personal history, current events in their life, and other current changes at work.

## THE COSTS AND RISKS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

If we take the position that resistance to change is unavoidable and complex and choose not to address it directly, we will pay a price in terms of change outcomes and ultimately benefits realization. Resistance has been identified as a top obstacle to successful change in all of Prosci’s best practices benchmarking studies. Study participants identified the following costs of resistance:

- Project delays
- Outcomes or objectives not achieved
- Project abandoned
- Productivity declines
- Absenteeism
- Loss of valued employees

- Extra costs and risk
- Inefficiencies
- History of failed change

Resistance has costs – it is not free. And, in order to avoid these costs and the potential risks to a project or change initiative, we must develop a planned and intentional approach to manage resistance to change.

## MANAGING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

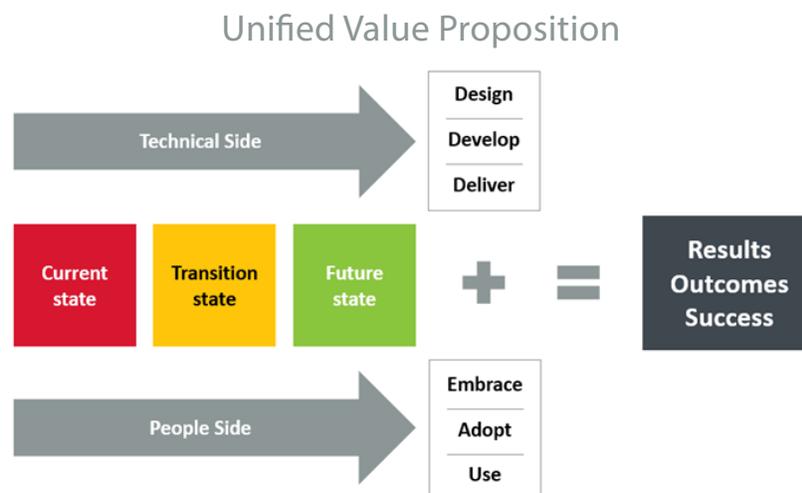
### 1. BEGIN WITH A PROCESS PERSPECTIVE

Prosci uses the terms Current State, Transition State and Future State to describe the three states of change. Resistance can occur at any of the three states and be rooted in specific concerns relevant to each state:

- Leaving the current state – perception that something is being taken away
- Going through the transition state – experience of being in an unknown or changing environment
- Arriving in the future state – the challenge of learning something new or fear of failure

Resistance can also be a response to the change that is happening. The perceived value of the change being introduced can introduce resistance; we call that change-specific resistance.

The visual shown below, the Prosci Unified Value Proposition, depicts change as a process with a technical-side workstream and a people-side workstream. These relate to the discipline of project management and change management, respectively.



This model depicts a system of elements necessary to achieve the desired results or outcome – how we define success for a specific project or change initiative. From a resistance management perspective, we are taking the necessary steps to mitigate resistance throughout the process so individuals can make a successful transition to the future state – adoption and use is achieved – resulting in organizational benefits and project objectives being realized.

## 2. CONSIDER THREE AVENUES OF RESISTANCE MANAGEMENT

Three avenues of resistance management will help mitigate the negative impact of resistance.

### Resistance prevention

Resistance prevention is about applying a structured and intentional approach to managing change. In other words, we apply the discipline of change management with resources trained to manage change. By doing so, we are taking the necessary steps to build awareness about why the change is happening, why it is happening now, and the risks if we don't change. We engage senior leaders and middle managers to communicate the priority of the change relative to other projects and change initiatives. And, we address the number-one reason for resistance to change – lack of awareness.

Potentially significant resistance can be avoided if effective change management is applied at the beginning of a project or change initiative. Prosci research participants indicated that almost half of the resistance encountered could have been prevented – a significant finding to address the costs and risks of resistance.

### Proactive resistance management

Proactive resistance management is the anticipation and early identification of likely resistance, so it can be planned for, addressed or eliminated upfront. We should consider where resistance is likely to come from and the objections or concerns that drive resistance – the root causes – and then act on them ahead of time.

### Reactive resistance management

After we have done both preventive and proactive resistance management, reactive resistance management comes into play when the project or change initiative “goes live” – when the change is real to impacted users. Reactive resistance management addresses resistance that could not have been anticipated or prevented or when resistance is enduring or persistent.

## 3. CONDUCT “ANTICIPATING RESISTANCE” DISCUSSIONS OR WORKSHOPS

One approach for putting these concepts to work and managing resistance to change is to conduct a series of ‘anticipating resistance’ discussions or workshops. This activity would be considered a component of proactive resistance management. It is recommended that you assess and examine resistance to change by impacted group, by organizational level, and due to organizational attributes.

- By impacted groups – The way that various impacted groups will respond to change varies depending on the nature of the change and the degree of impact. Identifying potential resistance to change can be done through an ADKAR assessment to identify the barrier point and develop specific tactics to address the barrier (awareness, desire, knowledge, ability and reinforcement).
- By organizational level – Why individuals resist change varies at different levels of the organization. Executives resist change due to a disconnect with their strategy, financial objectives or compensation. Middle managers resist change due to lack of awareness, loss of power or control, and overload of current responsibilities. Employees resist change due to lack of awareness of why the change is happening, not understanding the WIIFM (what’s in it for me), comfort with the status quo, and fear of the unknown. With this information, we can develop special tactics to address resistance throughout the change management process.
- Due to organizational attributes – The Prosci Risk Assessment examines change characteristics and organizational attributes to define the “people risk” of a change. Reflecting on the scores for the organizational attributes – specifically looking at scores that are 4’s and 5’s – will highlight specific areas that require a special tactic to address potential resistance. Examples include change capacity, history with past changes, organizational reinforcement and change competencies.

The output from these discussions or workshops will be targeted resistance management plans, with actionable steps and activities, to embed in the master change management strategy and plans.

#### 4. INTEGRATE RESISTANCE MANAGEMENT THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT LIFECYCLE

As a project or change initiative moves from the initial phases of design toward implementation, the project team should consider how resistance will be identified throughout the project lifecycle, such as by implementing specific mechanisms (measurement tools and soft measurements) to identify resistance. This activity would be considered a component of reactive resistance management. Examples include:

- Employee feedback – Employee feedback loops are created as a component of the Communications Plan and Coaching Plan (Phase 2 – Managing Change plans)
- Supervisor input – Managers and supervisors should have the opportunity during the coaching activities to provide direct feedback to the project team
- Project team issues – Issues that are identified by the project team should be logged directly to the project issues log or risk log to be monitored closely
- Compliance audits – Compliance audits conducted as part of the post-implementation support activities and focused on proficiency metrics will identify additional areas of resistance where support is needed

#### 5. BUILD RESISTANCE MANAGEMENT KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

It is critical to build resistance management knowledge and skills for organizational “people managers.” Empowering senior leaders, middle managers and supervisors with the knowledge and skills to identify

resistance, address root causes from both a personal and organizational perspective, and take the appropriate actions allows them to fulfill a critical role they share during change.

When we equip, support and enable managers to be competent in their resistance manager role, we should focus on:

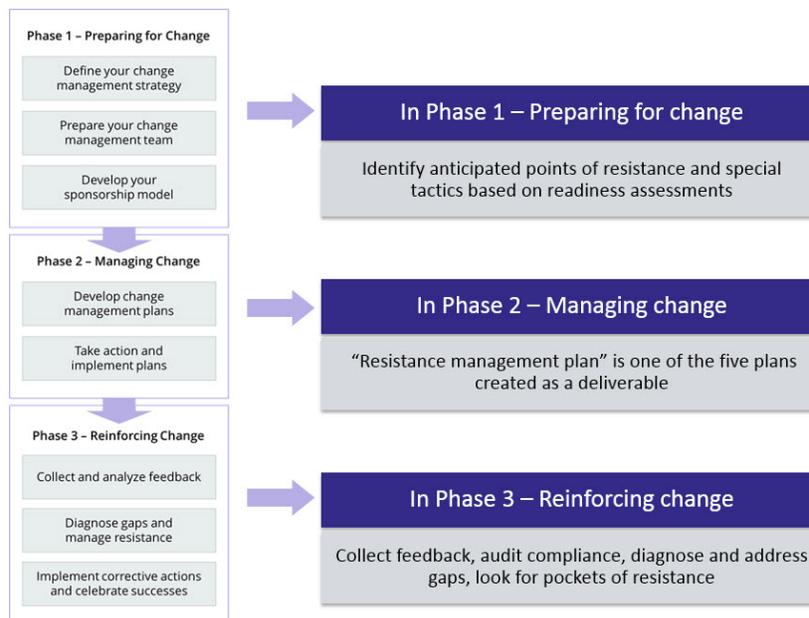
- How to have open and honest conversations and coach their employees
- How to communicate key messages in a way that connects with the interests of their employees
- How to help their employees be successful after the change is fully in place

An important note and prerequisite to formal resistance management training is that we need to recognize and understand that managers are employees first, and managers second. Prosci research participants identified mid-level managers as the most resistant group. This highlights how important it is that they go through their own ADKAR process before they can advocate for the change and manage resistance effectively.

## RESISTANCE MANAGEMENT IN THE PROSCI 3-PHASE PROCESS

Developing a planned and intentional approach to manage resistance to change is built into the Prosci methodology.

### Resistance Management in Prosci's 3-Phase Change Management Process



- Phase 1 – Preparing for Change – Proactive resistance management is done during the creation of the change management strategy focused on early identification and anticipated points of resistance so special tactics can be developed early in the change process.

- Phase 2 – Managing Change – The Resistance Management Plan is one of the five plans in this phase focused on moving individuals through their own change process and addressing likely barriers to change. Specific elements of the Resistance Management Plan are integrated with the Sponsor Roadmap and Coaching Plan.
- Phase 3 – Reinforcing Change – Feedback is collected to understand adoption and compliance with new behaviors prescribed by the change. This will help diagnose gaps and address ongoing resistance. We must also look for pockets of resistance and address those conditions head on. Prosci leverages ten steps for managing resistance when desire is the ADKAR barrier point and personal coaching is required.

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

Resistance is a natural reaction to change; but we have the power to control the duration, cost, and impact of resistance. How we support our employees through the change process and manage resistance to change minimizes the impact to employees, increases the effectiveness of the overall change management program, and opens the door to improved project outcomes and benefits realization.

# BUILD YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE CAPABILITY WITH PROSCI

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Over 80% of Fortune 100 companies have worked with Prosci to build their change capability. Our research-based, results-driven methodology is easy to apply. We can equip your organization with the tools to out-change others, remain agile and thrive during bigger, faster and more complex change.

## SCHEDULE A CONSULTATION WITH A PROSCI SOLUTION ARCHITECT

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Your no-cost consultation will:

- Define your organization's goals
- Assess your current state of change management maturity
- Review your change capability development strategy
- Provide actionable insights to drive your organization forward

[SCHEDULE MY CONSULTATION](#)

The People Side of Change

[info@tpsoc.eu](mailto:info@tpsoc.eu)

[www.tpsoc.eu](http://www.tpsoc.eu)