

45. Resistance to Change Typology

How should I interpret people's reluctance to change?

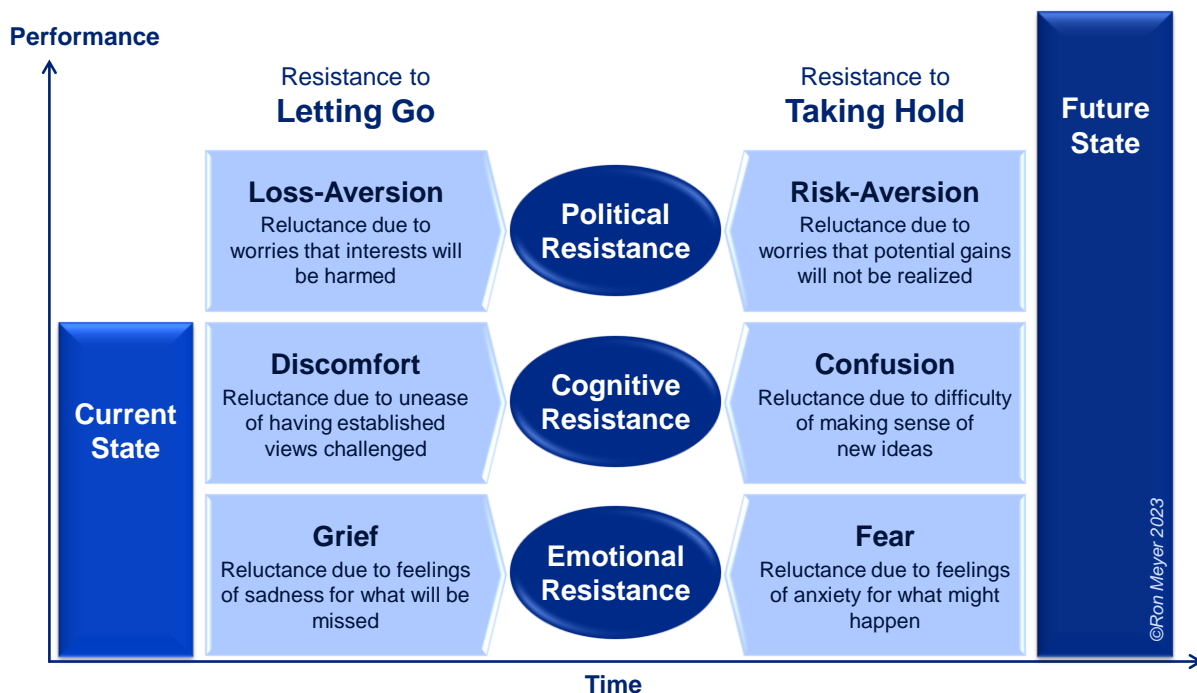
Key Definitions

Panta rhei – everything flows – was the observation made by Heraclitus about 2500 years ago. People change, organizations change, conditions change; only change itself is permanent. It can vary, from slow and incremental to fast and transformational, but occurs everywhere.

Yet not only change is ceaseless, so is people's inclination to *resist change* – to be reluctant to embrace the transition from A to B. When people value what they have, they show *resistance to letting go*; when they question what they are getting in return, they exhibit *resistance to taking hold*. Not everyone resists all the time, but it is a common human response to change.

Conceptual Model

The *Resistance to Change Typology* outlines the six generic categories of reasons why people experience reluctance to change from a current to a future state (also see Meyer's Model #1, the Mind the Gap model, for the challenges of change). The typology distinguishes between three different drivers of resistance, namely *interests* (political resistance), *views* (cognitive resistance) and *feelings* (emotional resistance). It also makes a distinction between resistance that is due to the need to *let go* of the current state and to *take hold* of the future state.



Key Elements

The six reasons that people resist change are the following:

1. **Political Resistance.** When people anticipate that a potential change might not serve their interests, there can be a strong motivation to push back. This resistance is called political as it is driven by people's perception of winning or losing part of their stake in the "game".

- a. *Loss-Aversion*. All changes involve the inherent threat of losing something of value, such as money, access to resources, influence, autonomy and standing. It makes “game theoretical” sense to avoid such losses of power and to safeguard your interests.
- b. *Risk-Aversion*. Most changes also offer potential gains, as an individual, department and/or organization. But it is seldom guaranteed that the future state will bring the projected benefits, making people hesitant to engage in such a risky endeavor.
2. **Cognitive Resistance**. When a potential change is at odds with people’s understanding of what is necessary, they are also likely to be reluctant to come on board. This resistance is called cognitive, as it is driven by people’s mental beliefs, assumptions, and reasoning.
 - a. *Discomfort*. If a change challenges people’s established worldview, pushing them out of their comfort zone and requiring them to let go of cherished certainties, this can cause mental anguish. People generally prefer to avoid such disorientation and distress.
 - b. *Confusion*. At the same time, change usually presents a new reality that is difficult to comprehend and internalize. New insights and new rules just don’t seem to make sense, leaving people confused. Rejecting such foreign ideas helps to reestablish mental order.
3. **Emotional Resistance**. When a potential change negatively impacts people’s deeper feelings, they are also more likely to push it away. This resistance is called emotional, as it is driven by people’s, often subconscious, inner sentiments and disposition.
 - a. *Grief*. If a change makes people feel they need to let go of something for which they have great affection and to which they have become psychologically attached, this can result in sorrow and the need to mourn. People prefer to evade the pain of grief.
 - b. *Fear*. At the same time, change usually triggers angst for what might happen en route to the future state and when the destination is reached. There can be fear of loss, discomfort, confusion, grief, and even fear of fear – all emotions preferably averted.

Key Insights

- **Resistance to change is about reluctance to let go and take hold.** In a change, you know what you have, but not what you’re going to get. Both aspects cause resistance. If you know what you have, letting it go can be disadvantageous, disorienting and even painful, while grabbing onto the new can be risky, confusing, and even outright scary.
- **Resistance to change can be political, cognitive, and emotional.** There are three core drivers of change resistance. *Political resistance* happens when people fret about what change will mean for their interests; *cognitive resistance* when people struggle with ideas contrary to their views; and *emotional resistance* when change triggers negative feelings.
- **There are six different types of resistance to change.** Political resistance comes in two flavors – *loss-aversion* when current interests need to be let go, and *risk-aversion* when potential future interests are difficult to ensure. Cognitive resistance likewise – *discomfort* at letting go of existing certainties and *confusion* in trying to grasp new views. Ditto emotional resistance – *grief* for letting go of present attachments and *fear* for what the future might bring.
- **The six types of resistance to change often reinforce each other.** All six types of resistance can come into play at different moments, but they are often intertwined in practice, as political and cognitive resistance quickly spark emotional resistance.
- **Resistance to change can trigger resistance to resistance.** For change managers it is crucial to understand what type of resistance they are facing. At the same time, they need to realize they might become *resistant to resistance* for many of the same reasons.

Meyer's Management Models

Insightful Tools to Kickstart Your Thinking

Publication Schedule

<i>July 2019</i>	<i>Mind the Gap Model</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>August 2019</i>	<i>Digital Platform Map</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>September 2019</i>	<i>Interaction Pressure Gauge</i>	<i>Interpersonal Interaction</i>
<i>October 2019</i>	<i>Revenue Model Framework</i>	<i>Revenue Model Typology</i>
<i>November 2019</i>	<i>House of Engagement</i>	<i>Organizational Engagement</i>
<i>December 2019</i>	<i>Confidence Quotient</i>	<i>Trust Building</i>
<i>January 2020</i>	<i>Competition Tornado</i>	<i>Competitive Strategy</i>
<i>February 2020</i>	<i>11C Synergy Model</i>	<i>Corporate Synergy Management</i>
<i>March 2020</i>	<i>Leadership Fairness Model</i>	<i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i>
<i>April 2020</i>	<i>Strategic Agility Model</i>	<i>Strategy Process Approach</i>
<i>May 2020</i>	<i>Control Panel</i>	<i>Corporate Control Dimensions</i>
<i>June 2020</i>	<i>Rising Star Framework</i>	<i>Talent Management</i>
<i>July 2020</i>	<i>Strategy Development Cycle</i>	<i>Strategy Process Steps</i>
<i>August 2020</i>	<i>7I Corporate Center Model</i>	<i>Corporate Organization</i>
<i>September 2020</i>	<i>Storytelling Scripts</i>	<i>Leadership Communication</i>
<i>October 2020</i>	<i>Strategic Bets Framework</i>	<i>Strategic Decision-Making</i>
<i>November 2020</i>	<i>Rebound Model of Resilience</i>	<i>Organizational Resilience</i>
<i>December 2020</i>	<i>4C Leadership Capabilities</i>	<i>Leadership Competences</i>
<i>January 2021</i>	<i>Digital Product Model Dial</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>February 2021</i>	<i>Digital Distribution Model Dial</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>March 2021</i>	<i>Empowerment Cycle</i>	<i>Employee Empowerment</i>
<i>April 2021</i>	<i>Innovation Box</i>	<i>Innovation Approaches</i>
<i>May 2021</i>	<i>Knowledge Sharing Bridges</i>	<i>Best Practice Sharing</i>
<i>June 2021</i>	<i>Followership Cycle</i>	<i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i>
<i>July 2021</i>	<i>Everest Model of Change</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>August 2021</i>	<i>Fruits & Nuts Matrix</i>	<i>Priority-Setting</i>
<i>September 2021</i>	<i>Powerhouse Framework</i>	<i>People & Organization Strategy</i>
<i>October 2021</i>	<i>Strategy Hourglass</i>	<i>Strategy-Making Steps</i>
<i>November 2021</i>	<i>Disciplined Dialogue Model</i>	<i>Interpersonal Communication</i>
<i>December 2021</i>	<i>Team Building Cycle</i>	<i>Team Building Process</i>
<i>January 2022</i>	<i>Market System Map</i>	<i>External Analysis Framework</i>
<i>February 2022</i>	<i>Strategic Alignment Model</i>	<i>Business Level Strategy</i>
<i>March 2022</i>	<i>Creativity X-Factor</i>	<i>Creativity Enhancement</i>
<i>April 2022</i>	<i>Organizational System Map</i>	<i>Organizational Analysis</i>
<i>May 2022</i>	<i>Corporate Value Creation Model</i>	<i>Corporate Level Strategy</i>

June 2022	Change Manager's Toolbox	Change Methodologies
July 2022	Sustainable You Model	Personal Sustainability
August 2022	Value Proposition Dial	Business Level Strategy
September 2022	The Tree of Power	Organizational Power
October 2022	Psychological Safety Compass	Team Dynamics
November 2022	Strategic Action Modes	Strategy Process
December 2022	Corporate Management Styles	HQ Management
January 2023	Thinking Directions Framework	Reasoning Skills
February 2023	5I Innovation Pipeline	Innovation Process
March 2023	Resistance to Change Typology	Change Management
April 2023	Status Snakes & Ladders	Leadership Branding
May 2023	Activity System Dial	Value Creation Analysis
June 2023	Customer-Centricity Circle	Organizational Design
July 2023	New Pyramid Principle	Presentation Approaches
August 2023	Corporate Strategy Framework	Corporate Strategy
September 2023	Best Practice Sharing Framework	Sharing Methods
October 2023	Ambition Radar Screen	Motivation Analysis
November 2023	Dynamic Business Paradigm	Competitive Advantage
December 2023	Dynamic Organization Paradigm	Human-centered Organization
January 2024	Interpersonal Interaction Levels	Communication Approaches
February 2024	Stakeholder Heat Map	Stakeholder Management
March 2024	Embedded Identity Model	Personal Awareness
April 2024	New Learning Curve	Personal Learning
May 2024	Partnership Distance Model	Interorganizational Relations