What can resistance to organizational change look like?

Purpose: *The table below describes the resistances that may show up, the cause, and the response.*

Introduction*:* Like how people can change, organizations can change as well. However, the evolution of these organizations is not always met with a positive response. In many scenarios, workers may reject organizational change and instead choose to resist it. There are five major types of change resistance regarding organizations; passive change resistance, active change resistance, attachment change resistance, uncertainty change resistance, and overload change resistance. Each of these types of resistances arises due to various causes and various responses. When researching change resistance, it's crucial to recognize the need in the context of purpose and ask questions such as "what is the real need?" and "Why are we here?" before deciding to do something new or different.

Type	Cause	Response
Passive change resistance	• Response to a threat activates fear in the brain. • Fear can be manifested in four different behaviors: fight, flight, freeze, or freak-out. • When someone displays passive resistance, you see a 'flight' or 'freeze' response (hide or move away from the threat not to be affected)	• Silence isn't always acceptance. The most silent may be struggling the most internally. • Threats are not the only factor that activates fear; imagined threats may also cause fear. • The goal is to make sure they don't create their fear by imagining negative impacts from the change. • Imagined negative consequences are the first and most strong threat responses • Encourage people to externalize their thoughts so they can find a more realistic and balanced perspective • One-on-one conversations OR conversations in group environments can help people to externalize.
Active change resistance	• Active resistance is often triggered by a threat that they want to "fight" to eliminate. • The change can cause them to lose control or feel unfairly treated. In response, active resistance attempts to reassert some lost autonomy. • It can also pose a risk to something they hold dear (e.g., a threat to status, job, intellect) or conflict with something with a hold over their beliefs or priorities.	• Understanding the potential threat your proposed change may present for people is crucial. It may vary from person to person, so reflect on this question early in your planning. • If the threat is real, the best approach is to surface it with them and explore together how it can be addressed. However, in some cases, the threat is imagined, and getting close to active change resistors early in the process enables you to understand their perceived concern better.

	• Active change-resistant behaviors can be viewed as change progress or when the impact of the change is imminent.	• Externalizing one's thoughts allows them to reflect on them with greater clarity and realize a more balanced perspective. By addressing fight responses early, frankly, and directly they lose most of their aggression. • To avoid heightening the tension, resist the urge of "fighting' back.
Attachment change resistance[1]	• Strong sense of ownership for existing practices/processes • Strong emotional ties to it or passionate about the "values" in it. May also connect it with their success • Brain can't hold 2 conflicting views simultaneously (anchoring bias, confirmation bias), this makes it very difficult for them to see the need for change, or to have a positive response to a replacement process.	• These people genuinely believe in the current process, making them unconsciously "blind" to what others may see as the drivers for change. • No amount of argument about the process will convince them. Your best approach is igniting a fresh reflection on the root problem you are trying to address. • You want to build from first principles, looking at it all 'as if for the first time.' • You can only loosen the grip of the "anchoring bias" and the "confirmation bias" by not triggering them in the first place. • The goal is to create a whole new neural network around a new solution to provide the basics to form a new picture.
Uncertainty change resistance	• Brain activity heightens when facing uncertainty. • The brain constantly works to make sense of situations and tends towards known patterns first. • In most change situations, there are gaps with no definite facts to fill the void; this leads to the fabrication of possible futures and wasted effort on things that may never happen & conjuring bad scenarios.	• Don't promote uncertainty! No matter how well-intentioned a follower is, it can be impossible to stop the rumination of mind once uncertainty grips them. Rumination can be a major stressor and distraction for them. • By recognizing where the certainty gaps are, you can influence people's assumptions to fill those gaps by guiding the conversation about possible futures. • Most importantly, keep people's attention on what is known, even if it's simply the specifics of the day-to-day work and deliverables.
Overload change resistance	**Change is common in most workplaces now.** • While change is 'normal', the amount of change in life isn't as constant as that experienced in organizations.	• In many cases, you are trying to introduce your specific change with no influence over the other changes that are contributing to the stress.

[1] *Note: some people can experience a 'grief' response when change replaces something strongly invested in. Strong emotional reactions might be an indicator of this response. Be conscious of reasons that might make them strongly attached; here's a simple overview of how the stages of grief might apply to an organizational change situation.*

	• Fast pace, series of changes, busy schedules, and change' is like the last grain of sand toppling the dune.	• The real cause of resistance to your particular change proposition is that people have reached the limit of their attention resources and have nothing to give. • Pushing back is a natural reaction to stop the flow of information that is fighting for attention. • Slim chance of becoming "priority one," you should work with positive attention grabbers, build personal connections, and focus on positive outcomes that help them. Most importantly, be present with them and what is going on in their world so you can see your window of opportunity and get your timing right for pushing your change forward.
Conflict Entrepreneur[2]	• People who inflame conflict for their ends. Sometimes they do this for profit, but more often for attention or power. They don't exist in every organization, more common in certain workplaces, such as hospitals, universities, and political or advocacy organizations.	• Know when to pause. Know when to disengage. Focus on feeding the narrative and culture you want to grow in your organization. • Scope the importance of this relationship in the context of your organization. Gauge what depth of interaction might be needed in relation to the ultimate goal---advancing equity in your organization through behaviors and actions.

[2] *Note (threat, risk, danger, urgency) will work, but only for a short and immediate need. If used when the driver is not truly critical or used for too long, you will only exacerbate the stress and lose people's confidence.*