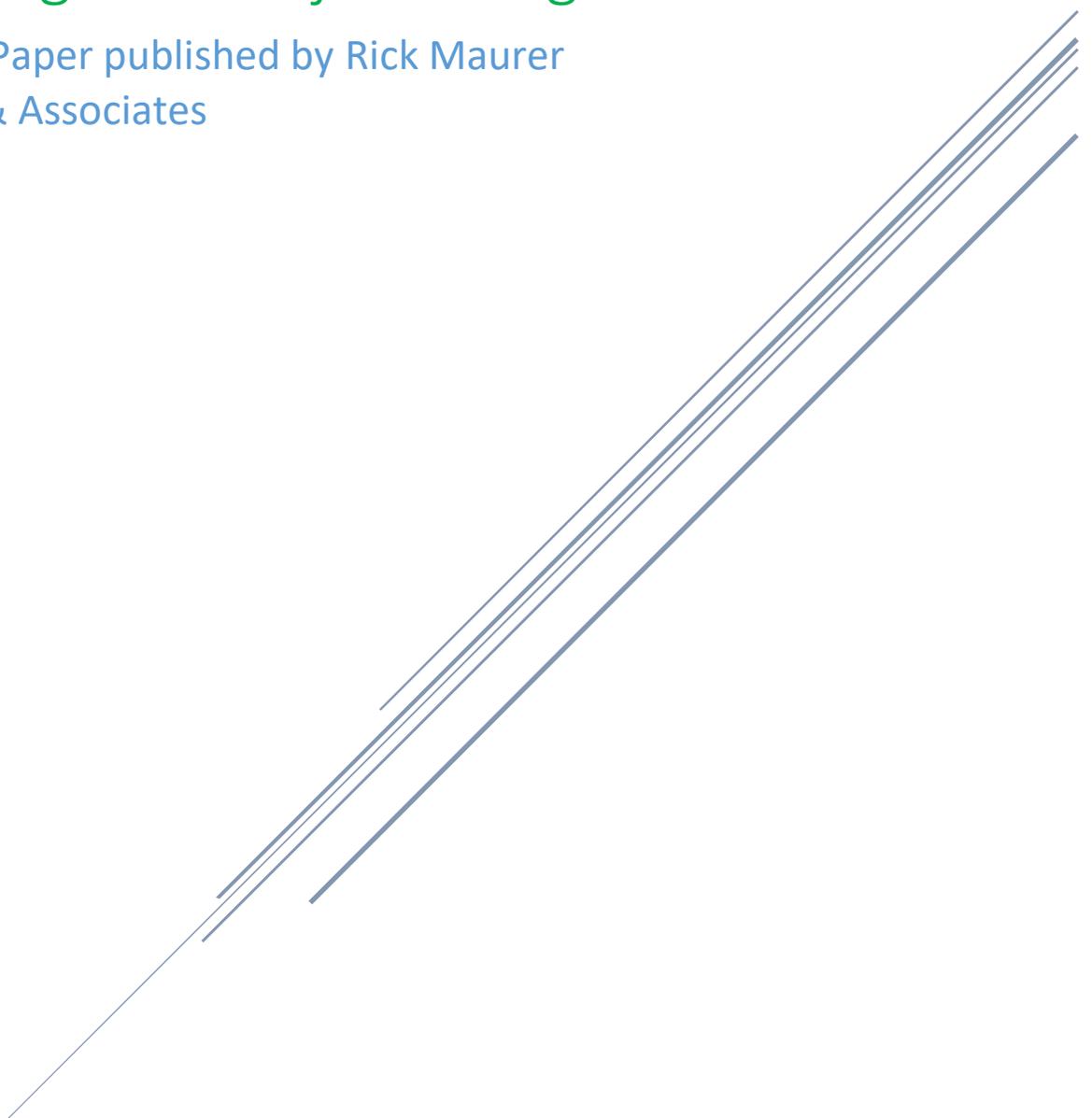


# Dealing Effectively with the Seven Key Challenges of Major Change

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## Dealing Effectively with the Seven Key Challenges of Major Change

Have you ever led a major change and out of nowhere some big hairy challenge reared its ugly head?

I identified seven of those big challenges that can occur anytime over the life of a major project. Do any seem familiar? You'll find ideas and tools that you can start to use right away to address that challenge. And all of these videos, assessments, e-books, and white papers are free.

### 1 STUCK IN THE STATUS QUO

Did you ever let a great idea simply die because you couldn't get other people interested in it? What did that cost in dollars and missed opportunities?

Often, even great ideas die. And the failure came from not making a case that a change was urgently needed.

It doesn't have to be that way; please take the assessment, [Assess Your Ability To Make A Case For Change](#) and watch the video below. If you use the tools on this page, you can improve your ability to get people's attention and their buy-in.



## 2

# THE CHALLENGES OF LEADING OVER-WORKED AND UNDER-PERFORMING PROJECT TEAMS

Are you overwhelmed by the pace, complexity, and sheer amount of change that you're expected to lead successfully this year?

I don't know a single leader who isn't.

Change in organizations is getting faster and more complex. And the failure rate of change hovers around 70 percent.

If you're a leader who oversees the work of many project teams, please look at the [Checklist for Sponsors of Project Teams](#). It could save you a lot of headaches and increase the effectiveness of those teams.



I encourage you to look at the short paper titled [The Challenge of Leading Over-Worked and Under-Performing Project Teams](#)

### 3

## RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Did you ever have a great idea killed by resistance?

A leader's inability to work with resistance – or avoid it in the first place – is a major reason why changes fail so often in organizations.

But leaders who understand why people might resist them often are better at avoiding it — and building support for their ideas.

Please watch the video that will show you how to spot resistance quickly and then complete the Resistance and Support Assessment, below. Once you do that, you will be able to see ways to reduce resistance and begin to build support almost immediately.



## Resistance And Support For Change Assessment

Think about a single person or group who must support you in order for you to succeed on a project.

Identify all of the Level 1 (understanding) things where you see eye-to-eye. Write those things in the Level 1 Support box.

Now, identify the Level 1 places where you disagree about the facts, or where you have information that this other person (or group) doesn't have access to.

### Move To Level 2.

Identify all of the emotional things that might be working in your favor. For example, "She believes that this change will be good for her personally. She wants what is best of the organization. And so forth.

Then identify the possible Level 2 places where she might have a negative reaction. For instance: afraid that she will lose her job, lose face, lose control, and so forth.

### Then Move To Level 3.

Identify the places where trust is high between you and this stakeholder. And then identify the places where he might not trust or have confidence in you regarding this specific project.

LEVEL	SUPPORT	RESISTANCE
Level 1		
Level 2		
Level 3		

Take note of this picture. What's working for you? What might be working against you?

If there are items in the resistance side of Levels 2 and 3, that's where you need to start your work. People will not be interested in Level 1 points until they feel safe enough to listen or until they believe that they can trust you.

If you had to place a question mark in any box, be careful. This means that you don't have access to important information. I encourage you to read short e-book, [The Magic List](#), for tips on ways to find out what the Level 1, 2, and 3 issues might be.

#### Next Steps

For more on the three levels, please read [Resistance to Change – Why It Matters and What to Do About It](#).

Also, you might take a look at the other six *Challenges of Change* in this White Paper. Some of those might help you address the challenge facing you today.

## 4

## FAILING TO LEARN FROM THE PAST

Ask yourself, how much does it cost you every time a major project dies before you ever see results?

Organizations lose millions of dollars on projects that start with lots of fanfare. Teams work hard and create detailed plans. But then, just when it seemed that they were so close to success, the project fizzles and dies.

It's sad that many organizations fail to learn from those setbacks and failures. But, it doesn't have to be that way. Take a look at the video below and I also urge you to complete the Resistance and Support Assessment on Page 4. It could save you lots of headaches -- and money.



[How to Lead Change Effectively by Learning from Past Setbacks.](#)

Are your employees deeply engaged in major changes?

I'm not talking slide shows followed by Q&A, but real roll-up-your-sleeves engagement?

Few organizations take advantage of the talent at all levels in their organizations. That's costly. It takes more time to "sell" the changes. Resistance may derail major projects. In addition, the failure rate is likely to be much higher.

Engagement isn't that hard. In fact, it's much easier than dealing with malicious compliance and resistance.

I encourage you to watch the video below. Then complete the Guide For Holding Effective Planning Meetings (You will find that tool on the next page). Those actions could save you lots of hours and potential headaches.



## Guidelines For Engaging People In A Planning Meeting

One key to successfully getting a change started on the right foot, is to use meetings effectively. Too often, so-called planning meetings are passive. People sit in the dark while people show them slides. You need meetings that are alive. Noisy. Where people want to jump in and do the work.

Here is a list of things to consider when holding a planning meeting. By the way, I have seen successful meetings held by ten people as well by three hundred. But what the small and large meetings had in common was that they adhered to many of the things on this list.

-  Invite representatives from all groups that have a stake in the outcome of this change. When possible, invite everyone. If that's not possible, make sure all groups and interests are represented.
-  Consider using a planning group made up of many diverse interests to help you plan this meeting. This will help you see things you might miss. Plus, you are getting some people engaged just by planning the planning meeting.
-  Pre-assign seats so that each table of eight to ten people is a maximum mixture of the whole. Every table should be a microcosm of the entire organization. Each table should include various departments, interests, and levels of the organization. Do not allow people to sit wherever they like. You need diversity of thinking, experience, and professional interests.
-  Allow plenty of time for conversation. Don't try to speed things up. Good conversation is a cornerstone of an effective planning meeting. Make it active.
-  Emphasize conversation, not presentation. Except for an introductory presentation that sets the stage (and even that might not be necessary), don't make speeches.
-  Before getting reactions to a presentation, make sure people are clear about what has just been presented. Ask for questions of clarification before you get people's reactions. If you miss this step, people will be responding from their assumption about what they think they heard, rather than responding to the actual idea.
-  Invite resistance. The creators of Real Time Strategic Change and Whole Scale Change developed a simple technique. After a proposal is made, each table is asked to respond to three questions: What makes you glad (about this proposal)? What makes you mad? What would you add (or change)?
-  Tell people how you will use this information. And then keep your promises. If you say you'll get back to them within three days, don't miss that deadline. In fact, the sooner you can get back to people, the better.
-  Be honest. If some items are not negotiable, tell people, and tell them why that's so. Don't pretend that everything is open for discussion if that's not the case. You may take some heat for this, but it will be far better than acting like you are open to being influenced when you are not.



Consider using an unbiased facilitator even for small planning groups. A good facilitator can keep things moving. Slow things down when that's needed. And a facilitator can allow you to be an active participant.



Stay awake. Meeting agendas are merely road maps. Actual driving conditions will vary. If it seems clear that people are resistant to something, take time to explore what's in their hearts and on their minds. I have seen good meetings disintegrate simply because the leaders felt compelled to get through the agenda in spite of what was occurring in front of them.

## 6

## FAILING TO KEEP CHANGE ALIVE

How successful are you at keeping change alive so that all that effort turns into the results you intended?

Many important projects die at just about the time when they should be yielding big benefits.

You may not believe this, but keeping change alive isn't all that difficult – it's just kind of boring and taken for granted. If you are at that point in a project right now, I urge you to watch the video below and then review the Checklist for Keeping Change Alive on the next page. It will show the places where you must provide focus and leadership.



## Checklist For Keeping Change Alive

I came across a list of things that sustain commitment to change. This was put together by a group of engineers and managers in a class that I led. I like what they came up with for the most part.

1. Celebrate short term wins.
2. Change rewards systems so that people are rewarded for working toward the change.
3. Involve people in the implementation planning.
4. Delegate and provide resources.
5. Define scope and direction of ownership.
6. Build business literacy.
7. Create permanent vehicles that will endure. (I wish they had been more specific on this one.)
8. Demonstrate symbolic leadership — be visible.
9. Communicate up and down results and feedback.
10. Build common languages.
11. Translate into behavioral terms.
12. Identify dumb things that must stop.
13. Funeral for the past.

## Resources & Tools For Keeping Change Alive

### Keeping Change Alive

For many people, keeping the change alive is the boring part. All the hoopla, brainstorming, and exciting new ideas are a distant memory. Now you are making sure the bugs are out of the system, the new technology works, people's questions are answered, the work is moving you toward your desired goals.

#### [Tips for Keeping Change Alive](#)

These are tips submitted by people who are out there leading change inside organizations.

#### [23 Great Ideas to Help Keep a Change Alive](#)

Many changes die before they ever give you any real benefit. Knowing how to keep commitment high is critical. This article gives you great ideas from people who are out there trying to get things accomplished.

#### [How to Sustain Commitment to Change](#)

This short paper lists the critical factors in keeping the change alive.

#### What Keeps Change Alive?

Here's a question I posed to the people who read my newsletter, Tools for a Change. So the question is, what do you do to keep major changes alive?

Have you ever been ready to roll out a major change, and then realize you didn't have the support you needed to for this to succeed?

I'm not talking about those times when a change withered because nobody kept it alive. This is different. You thought momentum was building and success was guaranteed. But then you realized that many of the key stakeholders were actively opposed to this project.

This is a difficult situation and there are no magic answers. But, please take a look at the video and then read the 11th Hour Guide and determine what options you have so you don't lose another minute.



## The 11<sup>th</sup> Hour Guide

You may find yourself months into a project and realize that this major change is slowing to a halt. And if you don't do something to turn things around, the project will fail. Sometimes there are good reasons why you couldn't build support earlier. For instance, news of the merger may have had to be kept under wraps until the final agreement was signed. Or perhaps a fully-formed project was given to you from someone on high, and now it's your job to bring it to life.

Or, perhaps things aren't working due to something that you could have done differently. For example, let's say you assumed that gaining support of stakeholders would never be an issue. You thought the idea was so good that everyone would rejoice when they learned about it. And you were wrong.

Whatever the reason, you are where you are, and you've got to build or rekindle support for this project right away.



### There Are Three 11th Hour Problems I've Seen:

**We Rolled Out the Change and Nobody Noticed.** We went live on April 1 and nothing happened. Two weeks later, and still nothing is happening.

**The Project Just Vanished.** Everything seemed to be going fine, and then talk of it moved farther and farther down the agenda. And today it is hardly ever mentioned.

**Ugly – Really Ugly – Resistance is Bringing Everything to a Stop.** People are actively opposing this project. They may be doing things to sabotage it.

No matter which scenario fits, you need to sit down with people you trust and who have a handle on what's really going on, and discuss a few important questions. And then, make sure you know what's on "the list."

## Ask The Big Questions

What do we think will happen if we continue on the path we are on? How likely is it that we will be successful? And, why do we think that?

Answering these questions, you probably said, "We're going to fail." "The project will go way over time and budget." "We'll only get some low hanging fruit from all this work." And then, very quietly, you may have added, "And this will be a serious blot on my own reputation and the reputation of my group." This is serious stuff.

Is the problem technical, financial, priorities, or people?

**If it is a technical problem** – the wrong IT platform or equipment, buggy software, and so forth – it probably calls for a technical solution. People may not support the project because it gives them headaches to work on it.

**If it is financial** – this usually means that budget has been pulled away from this project or this change never did have an adequate budget in the first place. If that's the case, you need to find the money. You'll either have to get more money or take money from some other beloved projects.

**If it is priorities** – for instance, people are expected to work on this project while still treating everything else as a top priority – then you've got a leadership problem. You need to be willing to put other projects and routine tasks on the back burner for now. That is an act of courage in many organizations. But that's why you are a leader, right?

If the problem is that people are not engaged or they are actively resistant, then you need to address those common human issues. (The remainder of this article offers some suggestions to help you do just that.)

Asking the big questions out loud makes you and other leaders acknowledge that this is a crisis and must be dealt with like any crisis. And it will take lots of attention immediately. You can't postpone work on the problem and expect it to wait until you have time to address it.

Answers to the big questions could be the wake-up call you need in order to get the project back on track.

If you know the problem is technical, financial, or priorities — put this article down right now and go fix the problem.

Of course, some 11th hour problems may be a combination of technical, financial, priorities, and people. If so, you need to address all four. So, simply getting people reinvested in the project without providing software to do the job, budget to pay for what they need, or relief from too much work and too little time means you're still going to fail.

Sometimes you don't know if the problem is financial, technical, priorities, or people. If you don't know, find out what's on the list.

## **Find Out What's On The List**

Now that you know what you and your peers think, you need to find out what stakeholders are thinking and feeling regarding this change. The list is a key tool in my own work with clients. I've got to know what's on the list before I can offer any advice on how to build support for change. Often the things that appear on the list are difficult for people to say out loud. Chris Argyris (Organizational Traps 2002) refers to these items as undiscuss-ables.

The information on that so-called list is critical. Without that information, you'll be trying to fix an 11th hour problem without knowing why the project is in trouble. It will be like trying to fly through a storm without radar. But with that information you can plan.

If you'd like to know how to find out what people involved in the change think and feel about the change itself and the people leading them, please read [The Magic List](#). It is quick read and should give you the tools you need to start finding out people's unspoken reactions to this change.

Once you know what's on the list, you'll need to figure out what it all means. The Magic List can give you some pointers on how to do this, but I think you'll find that most of the responses will be in Level 1, 2, or 3:

**Level 1: I don't get it**

**Level 2: I don't like it**

**Level 3: I don't like you (or a little more accurately, I don't trust you.)**

Your support – and resistance – comes from those three areas. In other words, people either understand what you are talking about or they don't. They either are excited, committed, engaged in the change – or they are scared out of their wits. Either they trust the people leading them on this project or they fear that the clowns are running the circus.

Once you know what's on the list, you can begin to apply what you know.

## **We Rolled Out The Change And Nobody Noticed**

The problem could be that no one was really on board and they were just placating you by going through the motions. They had hoped that the project would just vanish, but, alas, you went ahead and rolled it out.

Here's where the list can come in handy. The fix could be simple. People may not know why the change is needed or what the project itself is all about (Level 1). It could be that new people have joined the team since this project began, or perhaps older employees may have forgotten why this project ever mattered. (Many of the old TQM quality improvement efforts died simply because it took too long to get things moving.)

As you look at the data on the list, see if people see (and feel) why a change is needed. If they don't seem to know why this project is important, then you need to make a compelling case for change. If you feel like you've already done that, you may be right, but you'll need to do it again.

If the list shows that people don't know what they are supposed to do or how to do it, then listen to that advice, and provide direction or training or whatever else you think will help people roll-up-their-sleeves and get to work. It may sound simple, but just ask people what they need in order to do the job. You don't have to be Solomon and have all the right answers. Good questions work too.

If the list reveals lots of fear (Level 2), then you need to actively engage people in addressing those issues. You don't need to have the answers, but you do need to be open and curious.

One very good question to ask, "Is there a way that we can move ahead with this project that will increase job security?" So the issue might not be job security, it might be safety, or fear that this change will just add lots of paperwork to their jobs, or something else. This simple questioning gets people involved in changes that affect them. They get a chance to influence parts of the change that matter most to them.

To learn more about dealing with Level 2 issues, read [How to Work Effectively with Level 2 Resistance](#).

But, what if they don't trust you (Level 3)? Lick your wounds and then read the list carefully. What is it they don't like about your leadership on this project. Maybe they see you (and/or the executive team) as flavor-of-the-month leaders, or duplicitous, or out-of-touch, or too concerned about currying political favor from above while sacrificing those who report to you.

You don't have to agree with your own assessment of your leadership qualities, but you do need to take their Level 3 concerns seriously. You cannot preach to them or say, "Trust me, I'm not a crook."

The only game in town is to begin to demonstrate that this time you are acting differently. You might even say, "I know the word on the street is that I am too quick to move onto some other project. I want to demonstrate to you that this time is different. In fact, within the next two weeks here is what you can expect from me. And for the next two months, you can expect to see A, B, and C."

And then after you make those promises, deliver so that you confound people's expectations. You want them to say to themselves, "Whoa. Maybe she is serious this time."

Level 3 does not turn around easily. Sad to say that trust is difficult to build and easy to destroy. To learn more about working with Level 3, read [How to Work with Level 3 Resistance](#).

For more help, read:

[Resistance to Change – Why it Matters and What to do About it](#)

## **The Project Just Vanished**

The suggestions for 'We Rolled Out the Change and Nobody Noticed' apply here as well.

In addition, there are some basic things that leaders of successful changes do to keep projects alive so they achieve real results. Read how to [Sustain Commitment to Change](#). It covers seven vital, but often neglected, tasks that you must perform. Those seven items are:

- Leadership. (that is, people know that you are 100% behind this change)
- Clear Contract. (so that leaders all down the line know what's expected)
- Beware of scope creep – so that the project doesn't keep growing like a blob of goo from a 1950s sci-fi movie.
- Speed. There is no magic correct speed, but the leader needs to sense how fast this project can move safely.
- Ownership. People need to feel ownership.
- Resources. People have the tools they need to do the job.
- Rewards. The rewards are linked to actions that support the new goals.

[23 Great ideas to Help Keep Change Alive](#) is a rather long article that includes tips from people like you who worked on changes that actually succeeded. The article is filled with real examples of what they did to keep the change moving.

## **Ugly – Really Ugly – Resistance Is Bringing Everything To A Stop.**

This is a big deal. Read the list carefully. There are probably many strong Level 2 fears and Level 3 issues of distrust. You have no choice: these issues must be addressed.

[Tips for Getting Back on Track](#) is an article that covers some of things I've addressed here, but includes a few more tips as well.

Unless you are experienced working in situations in which people are wildly resistant – don't go there alone. There are too many pitfalls and too many places where you can inadvertently make matters worse. My strong suggestion is get help. Here are some places you might look:

- It might be time to reconnect with a mentor or leader in a position like yours who just seems to handle resistance well. Ask him or her for advice and counsel. One meeting will not be sufficient. Arrange regular conversations. If you let more than a week elapse between calls, you may be waiting too long.
- Your coach. If you've got a good executive coach, see if this person can advise you on working with widespread resistance.
- A consultant you know who is savvy about how to rebuild trust and support.
- A cross-functional and cross-level group of no more than a dozen people who can advise you on getting things back on track.

Whatever you do, expect that some things will work and others won't. Learn from all these experiences and improve your game.

## **Acknowledgements for the 11<sup>th</sup> Hour Guide**

A special thanks to members of my change group on Facebook. Your support and ideas helped me frame this article and move in some directions I might not have thought of. I appreciate your help. Kathy

Bennett, Woody Berzins, Lon Blumenthal, Joe Brodnicki, Alex Brandt, Catalyst Consulting, Michael Chirichello, William Jackson, Laurie Mendelow, Leo Reid, Sharon Richmond, Heather Stagle, and Tom Stratton. And my apologies if I inadvertently left someone off this list.

## About the Author:



Over twenty years ago I started looking deeply at why people resisted change in organizations. This resulted in my book, *Beyond the Wall of Resistance* (1996, 2010). I soon realized that what I was learning applied to anyone who needed to get others interested in their ideas. As a result, I wrote *Why Don't You Want What I Want?* (2002) to help individuals influence others more effectively. Sales people, clergy, hourly workers, middle managers, executives, and even parents have told me that the approach I developed works.

Over the years, I kept looking for ways to simplify (but not dumb-down) my approach. The Energy Bar™ is the latest tool to help people engage and influence others more effectively. It seems to be equally effective helping people who lead major changes to individuals who are just trying to get their ideas heard.

I have worked with a pretty wide variety of organizations including Lockheed Martin, Sandia Labs, Deloitte & Touche, National GeoSpatial Intelligence Agency, Rohm & Haas (Dow Chemical), Verizon, Syngenta, Charles Schwab, National Education Association, The Washington Post, NASA, Urban Libraries Council, Tulane University Hospital, Kaiser Permanente, and many government agencies. I work in the US, Canada, the United Kingdom, Russia, Denmark, and Belgium. And with clients in many other countries via Skype. Currently, *Beyond the Wall of Resistance* is being translated into Chinese.

And I am a fledgling jazz musician in the Washington, DC area.

You can reach me directly at 703-525-7074 (U.S.) and at [rick@rickmaurer.com](mailto:rick@rickmaurer.com)

If you'd like more ideas, please sign up for my newsletter.