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Embrace Resistance as Your Friend: Enterprise Architecture and IT Governance Helps Manage Change

Submitted by [A-G Magazine](#) on Mon, 05/04/2009 - 8:30am.

Anyone who has ever served as a change agent knows how challenging it can be to run up against die-hard critics, who it often seems will resist change until their last ounce of breath. Of course, not all criticism is bad; that is why we ask people for and encourage “constructive criticism.”

In truth, every criticism, as hard as it may be to hear, can be used constructively—even if it wasn't meant that way!

The April 2009 issue of the *Harvard Business Review* states that “resistance is, in fact, a form of feedback by people who know more about day-to-day operations than you do.” Moreover, “it can be turned into a vibrant conversation that gives your change effort a higher profile.”

In my view, there are **four major types of people who provide feedback to new ideas**:

HUNGRY FOR CHANGE: Those who see the need for change—either people seeking the “right” change or people who are disenchanted with the status quo and yearn for just about any change—are enthusiastic for it, want it to succeed, and will contribute to its general success.

MISCOMMUNICATORS: They are skeptical of change, and while they intend for their feedback to be constructive, it just doesn't come out that way—instead it comes across as overly harsh, negative, or obstinate.

SCAREDY-CATS: Some people are afraid of change (or threatened by the change agent); they may not understand it, may have been burnt by failed change initiatives in the past, or are just plain comfortable in the status quo and don't want that comfort to be disturbed.

NO WAY, PERIOD: And finally some may be against change no matter what. These folks may be mean-spirited, antisocial, or otherwise challenged—from them we can expect some serious destructive criticism.

In any of these cases, “it takes a strong leader to step up and engage when a change effort meets with pushback.” But if you turn the criticism into feedback, weed out the useful engagement from the chaff, and take away something positive, you can ultimately deliver a better product for the organization.

Harvard Business Review recommends that we treat such communications “with respect and are willing to reconsider some aspects of the change you're considering”—in other words, be flexible.

You may have to “change the change”—use alternate ideas that would still meet the objectives of the plan. However, in the end, the change will receive greater acceptance because it was collaborative and widely vetted. Furthermore, the change may also actually be more productive, since it likely will more accurately reflect the broader needs of the organization.

Change agents usually will never win over everybody, but they can articulate their ideas, vet them with others, refine them, and continuously engage with the stakeholders to deliver tangible results.

Unfortunately, some change agents are so fixed on what THEY want to do, that they are blind to everybody else. They think it's their way or the highway. Their eyes and ears are closed—no good!

It's one thing to use the foot in the door technique to get momentum for change, and it is quite another to kick down the door.

No one should think they have all the answers and be headstrong in either making a particular change happen or standing in the way of change completely. Rather people who see the need for change need to work with those who oppose it in order to implement the changes that will really benefit the organization.

A healthy dose of skepticism is fine. And change should be explored and tested before being fully committed to. But at

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the same time, new ideas and ways of doing things should always be welcome. Truly, there always is a better way—sometimes with out-of-the-box thinking, breaking old paradigms, or with new technology.


We all need to think creatively to suggest new ideas and also be receptive to changes from others.

by **Andrew N. Blumenthal**, the Chief Technology Officer of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives

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