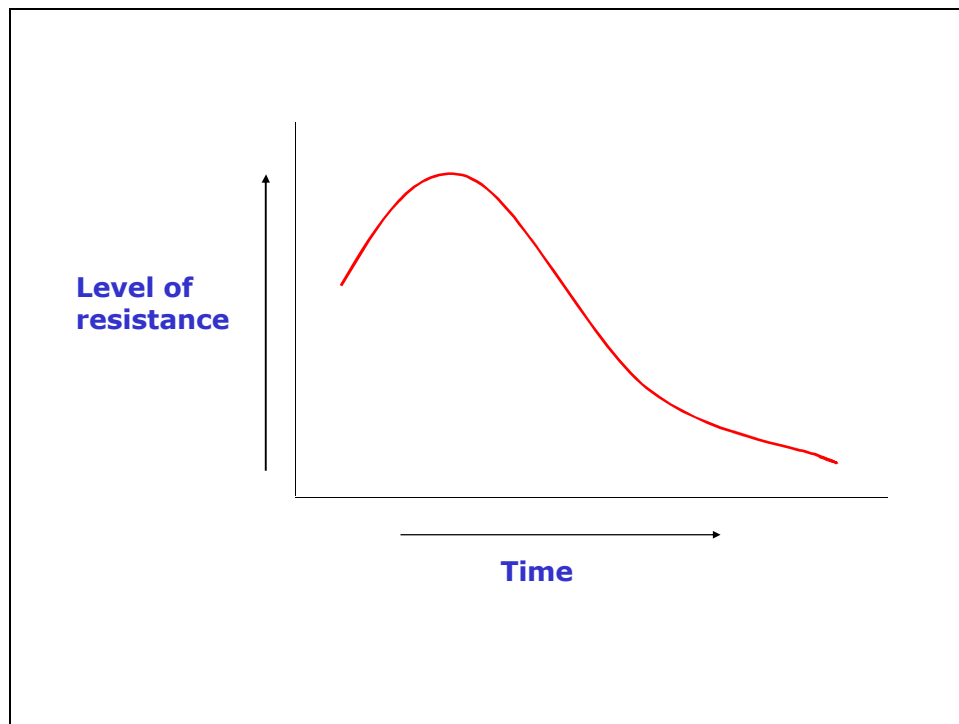


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# **Reacting to Change – how do staff really come to terms with it?**

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One of the most popular ways of analysing and predicting individual reactions to organisational change is use the Elizabeth Kubler-Ross model originally designed to describe individual reactions to grief. In this model the five stages of grief are identified as denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance. Consequently, the response to organisational change is often presented by a graph like the one below showing how initial denial and then resistance eventually turns into acceptance.



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The problem with this approach is not only that it suggests an inexorable path towards acceptance, but it also leads change agents to be rather dismissive of those who oppose the changes they are seeking to introduce. *'If they're against it it's because they don't like change, but they'll come to terms with it in the end'*. It could actually be that staff are against the change for good reason and eventual acceptance may hide a deep sense of alienation.

Here is a development of the model which recognises that reactions to change vary from individual to individual, that not everybody goes through all the stages and that both resistance and acceptance can take different forms.

### **1. Denial/Avoidance**

This may include turning a 'deaf ear' to proposed changes – hoping that they won't happen and relying on that hope

### **2. Resistance**

When denial/avoidance is no longer viable the next stage may be resistance. Resistance can take two forms – 'explicit resistance' and 'guerrilla resistance'. Explicit resistance involves articulating a structured argument against the change to those responsible (and perhaps leading or taking part in a campaign). Guerrilla resistance involves sniping at the organisation and spreading corporate cynicism.

### **3. Withdrawal**

For some people if resistance fails, the next stage may be 'withdrawal'. For some this may mean leaving the organisation (high staff turnover often follows organisational change). For others it may lead to breakdown or at least taking time off sick (possibly diagnostically labelled as 'stress'.)

*(continued)*

#### **4. Withdrawal/Acceptance**

This stage involves a grudging acceptance of the change – compliance rather than commitment with a consequent alienation and loss of motivation. It may involve continually looking backwards at what has been lost.

#### **5. Acceptance/Transcendence**

This is an alternative stage to Withdrawal and Withdrawal/Acceptance. In this stage the individual accepts the change and moves beyond it. It may involve re-examining the change and recognising that its implementation has actually produced some advantages and even lead to the reflection '*I was wrong*'. It involves the individual developing the new skills and knowledge the change requires and adopting the will to make the new system work and to polish its processes through contributing to continuous improvement.

#### **Related Courses**

- [Managing Change](#)
- [Managing Stress](#)
- [Strategic Thinking & Business Planning](#)

All courses are run regularly at our London training venue and are also available on an in-house basis.

See also ProSeminar's Top Tips Series: [Dealing with Change - a personal strategy](#).