

MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

Navigating implementation and
turning resistance into results



What Implementation Really Looks Like



Non-linear: Expect two steps forward, one step back.

The Messy Middle: Productivity usually dips before it rises.

Constant Adjustment: The plan will meet reality and need to change.

Time Investment: It takes longer than you think.

Uneven Progress: Some team members will 'get it' instantly, others won't.

Emotional Curve: Confidence drops before it rebuilds.

Leadership Visibility: Teams look to leaders more during uncertainty.

We often draw change as a straight line from Point A to Point B. In an SME, it looks more like a scribble. You have to be prepared for the dip - that period where the old way is gone, but the new way isn't fast yet. Don't panic when things get messy; that's actually a sign that the change is happening. If it feels easy, you probably aren't actually changing anything.

Remember: Progress won't be even. Some people will embrace the change quickly, others will hesitate or struggle and that is normal.

What is Resistance?

A Natural Response: A survival instinct, not a 'bad attitude'.

Not Always Negative: Often comes from people who care.

A Diagnostic Signal: Highlights gaps in your plan.

A Resource: Can improve the quality of change.

Driven by Perception: People react to what they think the change means.

Often about Impact: "What does this mean for me?"

Something to Work With: Not something to shut down.

Resistance is usually protective, not destructive

People resist because they are trying to:

- Protect their performance
- Protect their time
- Protect what already works

For example, if your top salesperson resists a new CRM, it's rarely because they are difficult - it is because they are worried it will slow them down and affect their results.

Resistance is data

It tells you exactly where your plan is weak:

- Lack of clarity
- Lack of training
- Lack of time
- Lack of trust

Also remember - people don't react to the change itself, they react to what they think the change means for them. The teams that challenge you the most often give you the insights that make the change actually work.



Types of Resistance

Silence: The most dangerous type - they have stopped engaging.

Active pushback: Loud objections (this is actually easier to fix).

Slow adoption: "I'll get to it eventually".

Passive compliance: Doing exactly what is asked but with zero heart.

The U Turn: Reverting to old habits the moment you aren't looking.



You need to be a detective. Active pushback is great because you know what the problem is. The real danger in an SME is malicious compliance or the quiet quit. This is when people nod in meetings but keep their old spreadsheets hidden on their desktop. You need to look for the workarounds - if people are finding ways to avoid the new process, your implementation is at risk.

Why People Resist

Fear of the unknown: "Will I still be good at my job?"

Lack of clarity: "I don't actually know what I am supposed to do"

Loss of control: "This was forced on me without my input"

The capacity crunch: "I am already working at 100%, I don't have time for this"

The trust gap: "Management always starts things and never finishes them"

Resist Change or Loss

People don't resist change; they resist loss. Loss of status, loss of competence or loss of time. In an SME, a new system can make a 20 year veteran feel like a trainee on day one. That's terrifying. If you don't address the fear of incompetence with extra training and patience, they will fight the change to protect their professional dignity.



Diagnose before Reacting

The Three C's

- **Clarity:** Do they know what to do?
- **Capability:** Do they have the skills to do it?
- **Capacity:** Do they have the time to do it?
- **Ask, don't assume:** "What is the hardest part of this for you right now?"
- **Root Cause Analysis:** Is it the person, or is it the process?

Before you get frustrated with a team member, diagnose the *Why*. If it's a clarity issue, you need to communicate better. If its capability, you need to train them. If its capacity, you need to take something else off their plate. Don't treat a time problem with a motivation speech. It won't work and it will breed resentment.

Turning Friction into Traction

Feedback as fuel: Use complaints to refine the workflow.

Spot patterns: If three people struggle with Step 4, Step 4 is the problem.

Co-creation: Involve the resisters in finding the solution.

Build ownership: "You found the flaw; how should we fix it?"

Prioritise what matters: Not all feedback needs action.

Close the loop: Show people their input made a difference.

Turn critics into champions: The loudest voices can become your strongest advocate.

Don't fight resistance - use it

The best way to handle a vocal critic in a small team is to give them a job.

Instead of pushing back, lean in: 'You're right - this part isn't working. Help us fix it.' Now they are no longer resisting the change - they are shaping it.

This is the shift from friction to traction:

- Friction slows you down
- Traction moves you forward

Look for patterns. If multiple people are struggling with the same step, that's not a people issue - it is a process issue.



When to Adapt vs Hold Firm

Hold firm on the why: The goal and the outcome are non-negotiable.

Be flexible on the how: If the team finds a better way to get there, let them.

Consistency is key: Don't abandon the project at the first sign of trouble.

Adjust the speed: It's okay to slow down, but don't stop.

Know what's fixed vs flexible: Be clear on what can and can't change.

Test & learn: Small adjustments improve long-term success.

Avoid overreacting: Not every issue requires a major change.

Firm on Direction, Flexible on Delivery

SME leaders often make the mistake of folding the moment things get hard. If you abandon a change because of early resistance, you send a clear message: If we push back enough, this will go away. That makes future change even harder. Instead think of yourself as a firm anchor with a flexible rope:

- The anchor is the outcome - you don't move it
- The rope is the approach - you can adjust it

Be very clear

- What is non-negotiable? (the goal, the direction)
- What is flexible? (the process, the tools, the timeline)

Quick Wins

Lower the stakes: Pick a 'low risk' area for the first win.

Show, don't tell: Publicise the first successful result.

Create momentum: Wins breed confidence.

Celebrate small successes: Don't wait for the 6-month mark to say 'well done'.

In an SME, you need a win within the first 14 days. It could be as small as the first invoice was sent through the new system or the morning meeting finished 10 minutes early. Celebrate these publicly. It proves to the skeptics that the change is possible and beneficial. Momentum is the only thing that kills resistance.

Remember to celebrate the people, not just the process. In an SME, recognition is free, but its value is immeasurable. When people feel seen for their effort during a transition, they will give you even more effort during the next one.

