



From Pushback to Progress

RETHINKING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

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Presenter

Mark Hamilton

Founder & CEO



“Every success story is a tale of constant adaption, revision and change.”

- Richard Branson

INTRODUCTION

Overview:

- Introduction
- Resistance to change: what it is—and isn't
- Resistance and leadership
- Reframing resistance
- Supporting change
- Key takeaways + Q&A

INTRODUCTION

We will learn how to

- Understand resistance to change as a signal, not an obstacle.
- Identify root causes of resistance and use them to guide stronger alignment and commitment.
- Engage teams in creating solutions, improving accountability and follow through.
- Apply a field-tested model (six-phase approach) for navigating culture change more effectively.

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE



What is Resistance?

Resistance is any action (or inaction) that stalls, avoids, redirects, or hinders change.

It is considered an obstacle, a problem, or challenge to overcome.

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Yet resistance is not a problem — it's a signal. It provides input and insight that can be valuable in shaping and implementing change initiatives.

It's about understanding people's perspectives, needs, and wants — and integrating those perspectives into the change project itself.

The Big Question

How do we get leaders and others to embrace change? How can resource people within the organization (ex. HR professionals) best support change — especially in the face of resistance?

Let's look first at what's going on when people resist change.

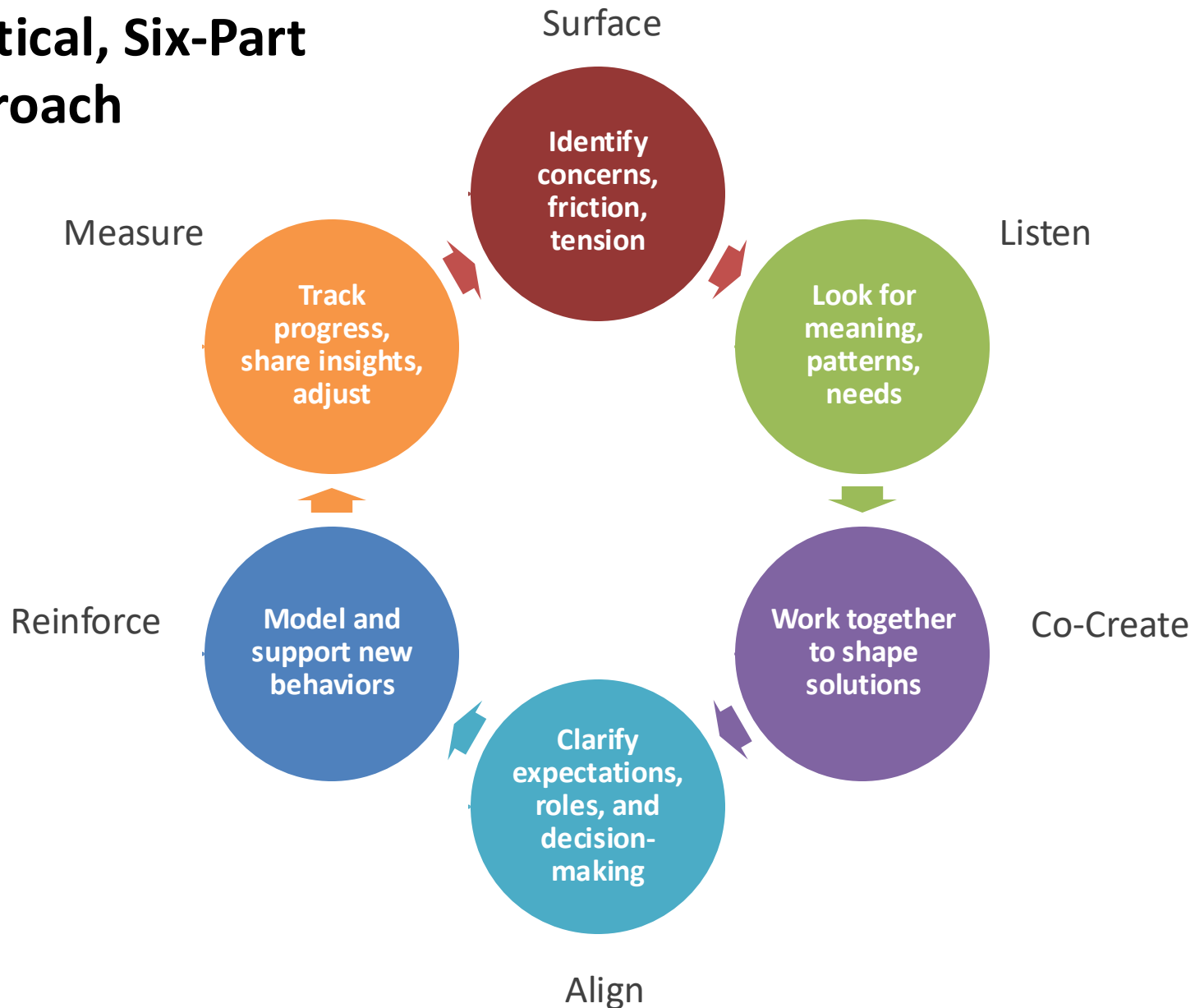
The Change Paradox

- What most people see: Employee pushback, defiance, refusal, apathy
- What's really happening: Friction, feedback, fear, mistrust, fatigue

Yet resistance isn't (always) a flaw—often revealing underlying issues that need to be addressed (e.g., skill gaps, workflow issues).

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Practical, Six-Part Approach



What Leaders Misinterpret (and What It Signals)

What Leaders See	What It Actually Means
Silence	Fear of appearing uninformed
Repeated questions	Unclear expectations or unclear scope
Workarounds	Friction, poor workflow design, or inadequate tools
Pushback	Past failures or capacity overload
Delay	Ambiguity about roles or ownership

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Common Forms of Resistance and Responses

Resistance Example	What it Means	How Leaders Respond
'There's no way I'm doing that!'	Fear, doubt, lack of awareness/trust, misunderstanding	Coax, pressure, blame, redirect (ex. assign change tasks to others)
'Why are we doing this, anyway?'	Lack of clarity, misunderstanding, misalignment (vision, values, roles)	Re-explain, shift responsibility, delay (ex. 'Just do what you can,' or 'It's not me.')
'Let's wait and see how this plays out.'	Lack of trust, doubt, misalignment	Coax, hesitate or stall, redirect (ex. I

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Case Study: Levi Strauss ERP Rollout

Levi Strauss wanted to modernize its operations. The company invested \$200 million in a new global ERP system to improve efficiency. However, payroll disruptions sparked conflict and delays. Warehouses struggled with new procedures, slowing orders and frustrating customers.

Leaders underestimated the cultural and operational disruption that such a massive change would create. The company eventually scrapped the system entirely, losing its investment.

Reflective Questions

1. How might leaders have addressed employee concerns in advance?
2. What role does cultural alignment play in the adoption of new tech?

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Quick Recap

- Resistance to change is not an obstacle, it's a signal.
- Resistance can tell us a lot about what's really going on.
- Leaders often do not know how to 'read', or respond, to change.





RESISTANCE AND LEADERSHIP

RESISTANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Leadership Resistance



3 Key Reasons for Leadership Resistance

1. Uncertainty: Leaders may be unclear about expectations, doubt their own capabilities, and be unsure how to move forward.
2. Loss of control: Leaders rely heavily on others to implement change and may feel vulnerable as a result.
3. Misalignment: Leaders may disagree about the scope or direction of change, how to best execute, and even disagree over the need for change.

Leadership Mindset Shift: From Driving Change to Facilitating Ownership

Directive  Interpretive

Driver  Facilitator

Reinforcing New Behaviors

Change sticks when leaders reinforce what matters most

- Reinforcement must be visible, consistent, and tied to values.
- Model new behaviors in 1:1s, team huddles, and decision processes.
- Embed reinforcement into routines (check-ins, retros, standups).
- Recognize early adopters and small wins to build momentum.
- Use feedback loops to support those struggling with the new expectations.

How to Measure Progress

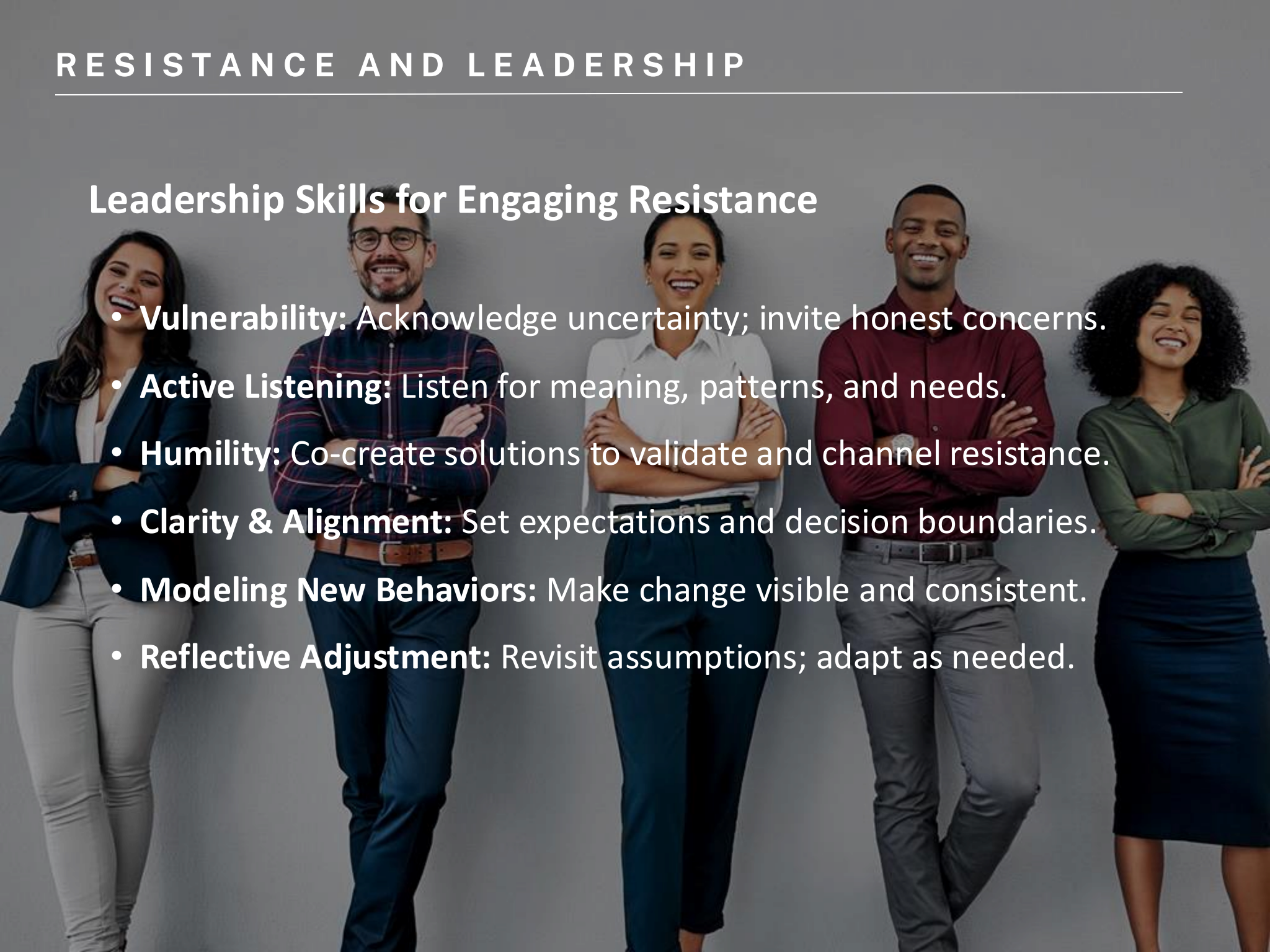
Look for signals of alignment rather than just activity

- Increased clarity in decisions and expectations
- Fewer workarounds or back-channel problem-solving
- More consistent communication across teams
- Improved psychological safety indicators
- Higher adoption of new workflows/behaviors
- Early identification of skills and capability gaps

Measurement should guide adaptation, not policing.

RESISTANCE AND LEADERSHIP

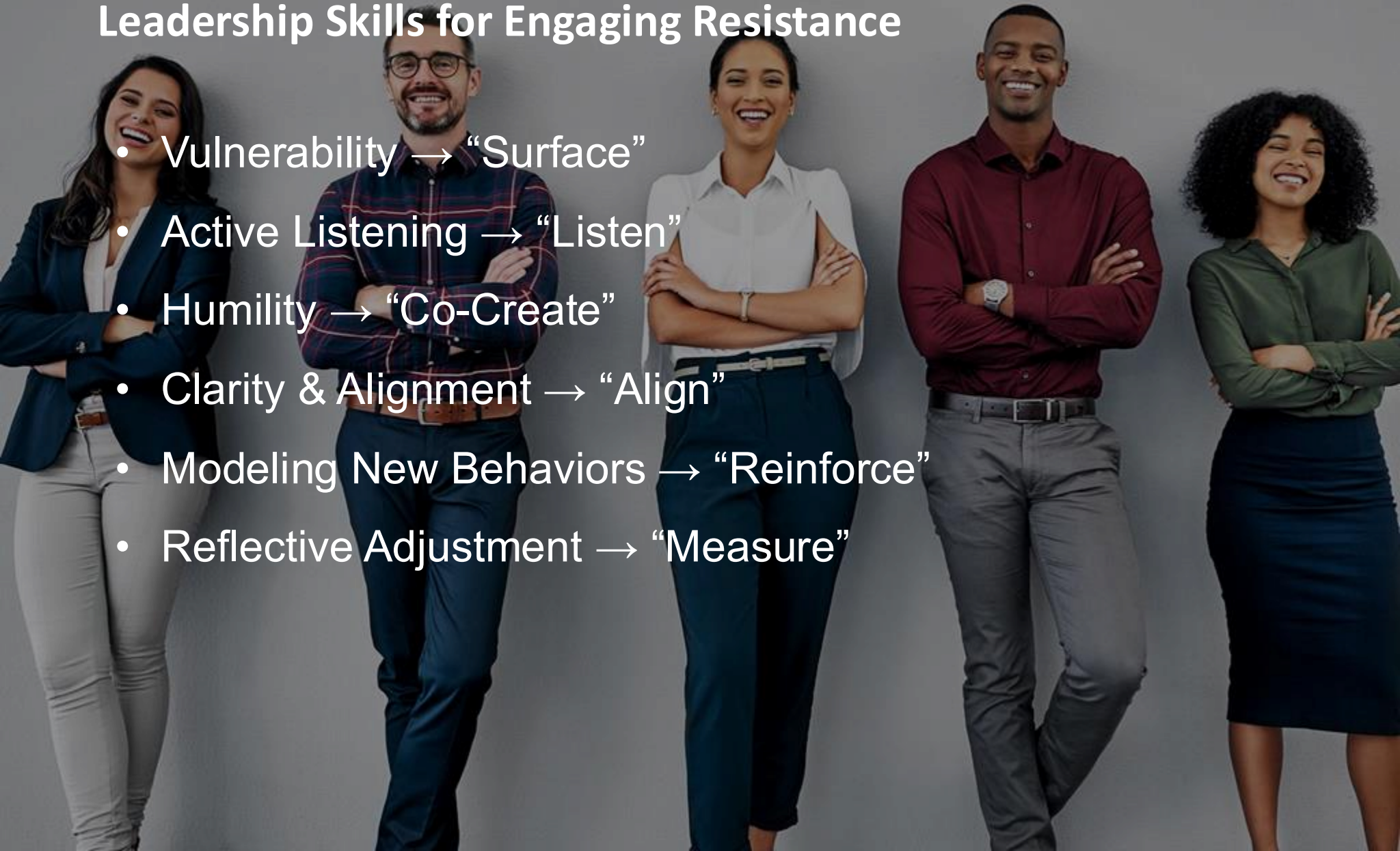
Leadership Skills for Engaging Resistance

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- **Vulnerability:** Acknowledge uncertainty; invite honest concerns.
 - **Active Listening:** Listen for meaning, patterns, and needs.
 - **Humility:** Co-create solutions to validate and channel resistance.
 - **Clarity & Alignment:** Set expectations and decision boundaries.
 - **Modeling New Behaviors:** Make change visible and consistent.
 - **Reflective Adjustment:** Revisit assumptions; adapt as needed.

RESISTANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Leadership Skills for Engaging Resistance

- Vulnerability → “Surface”
- Active Listening → “Listen”
- Humility → “Co-Create”
- Clarity & Alignment → “Align”
- Modeling New Behaviors → “Reinforce”
- Reflective Adjustment → “Measure”



RESISTANCE AND LEADERSHIP

4 Conditions That Support Effective Change

When fear and self-doubt dominate, employees may comply—but they won't contribute.

- **Safety** drives ownership.
- **Listening** leads to learning.
- **Vulnerability** builds trust, commitment, and respect.
- **Reflection** (i.e., self-awareness) helps leaders adjust.



RESISTANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Questions for Leaders and Teams

- Safety: Is it safe to speak up?
- Listening: Are leaders open to feedback? Do employees feel heard?
- Vulnerability: Are leaders able and willing to adapt to input? Are they defensive or responsive?
- Reflection: Do leaders actively and regularly review and adjust their own behaviors?



Leading Through Technological Change

Tech adoption amplifies emotional and operational friction

- Tech change creates fears of replacement, irrelevance, or exposure of skill gaps (ex. AI adoption).
- Leaders must explain purpose, reduce ambiguity, and prepare people for capability shifts.
- Emphasize tech as an enabler, not a substitute for judgment.
- Pair new tools with support, pacing, and psychological safety.
- Reinforce that learning curves are normal and supported.

REFRAMING RESISTANCE

A photograph of three people (two women and one man) sitting around a wooden table, engaged in a collaborative work session. The woman on the left is smiling and looking at a notebook. The woman on the right is wearing glasses and pointing at a document with a pen. The man on the left is also looking at the documents. The table is covered with various business documents, including one titled 'MONTHLY FINANCE DEVELOPMENT' and another titled 'Q4 Budget Breakdown'. A potted plant is visible in the background.

Reframing Resistance

Reframing resistance starts with psychological safety.

When people know it is safe to contribute—to speak out, experiment, and make mistakes without judgement—resistance is transformed into insight, buy-in into ownership.

As teams share their concerns and challenges with leadership—without fear—pathways emerge for improving the change itself.

Organizational Change and Culture

All successful, participatory organizational change results in ***cultural*** change.

HR's Strategic Role in Reframing Resistance

- **Culture Translator:** Acts as the bridge between leadership's strategy and day-to-day employee experiences.
- **Change Convener:** Brings together leaders, managers, and nonmanagers to identify challenges and solutions.
- **Safe-Space Creator:** Ensures that trusted forums exist for voicing employee concerns, frustrations, and fears.

As HR professionals, you represent the organizations where you work, not one party.

SUPPORTING CHANGE



Applying This in Your Organization

Start with one change, one team, or one workflow

- Identify a current friction point or upcoming change.
- Follow the six-part approach described earlier to surface concerns and listen intentionally.
- Co-create workable solutions with those impacted.
- Align expectations, decision rights, and timelines.
- Reinforce consistently and measure progress weekly.
- Scale only after the first small success.

SUPPORTING CHANGE

Change Tactics That Work

- Culture check-ins
- Team-led mapping sessions
- Shared decision frames



SUPPORTING CHANGE

Following the Six-Part Approach, We Use These Tactics to

- **Surface** → Culture check-ins
- **Listen** → Team-led mapping
- **Co-Create** → Mapping + decision frames
- **Align** → Shared decision frames



Surface Through Culture Check-ins

Culture Check-ins are frequent, recurring touchpoints to ask: *“How is this change affecting the way we work, decide, and interact?”*

- Use structured, recurring touchpoints to uncover concerns, friction points, and emotional load.
- Accept discomfort as ‘normal’ and create a safe space for surfacing real issues.
- Identify early warning signals to uncover root causes and guide resistance toward solutions.

Listen + Co-Create Through Team Mapping Sessions

Mapping Sessions are structured workshops or sessions where teams map out the impact of change on their daily work.

- Map how changes affect workflow, decision paths, and role clarity using team-led input.
- Listen for capability gaps, operational bottlenecks, and conflicting expectations.
- Co-create realistic adaptations and pilot solutions with the people doing the work.

Align Through Shared Decision Frames

Shared Decision Frames are templates or criteria that define *how decisions will be made* during the change.

- Use a simple shared template for how decisions will be made during the change.
- Increase consistency and transparency across teams to reduce confusion.
- Make tradeoffs explicit so employees see how decisions connect to strategy and values.



Reinforce + Measure Through Active, Regular Reflection

- Leaders are checking-in with their teams, and each other.
- Teams are generating their own solutions, testing them out, and fine-tuning as they go.
- HR professionals are facilitating understanding, creating safe spaces for dialogue.

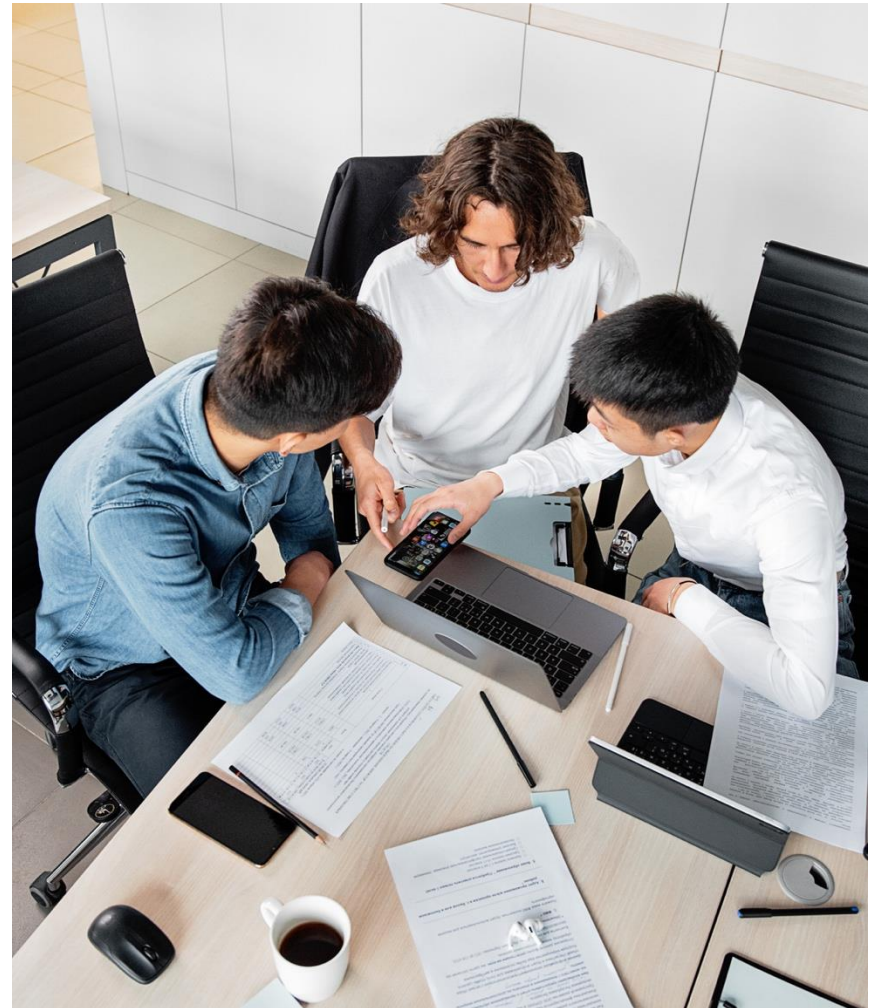
TAKEAWAYS

A group of four business professionals are seated around a light-colored wooden conference table in a modern office. The room features large floor-to-ceiling windows that offer a view of a city skyline. The participants include two women and two men. One woman, with blonde hair and glasses, is wearing a white button-down shirt. Another woman, with grey hair and glasses, is wearing a dark blazer over a white shirt. A man with dark hair is seen from the side, wearing a light-colored shirt. Another man is partially visible in the foreground, seen from the back of his head. On the table, there are several documents, a white coffee cup on a saucer, and a pen. The word 'TAKEAWAYS' is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif capital letters in the center of the image.

TAKEAWAYS

Key Ideas

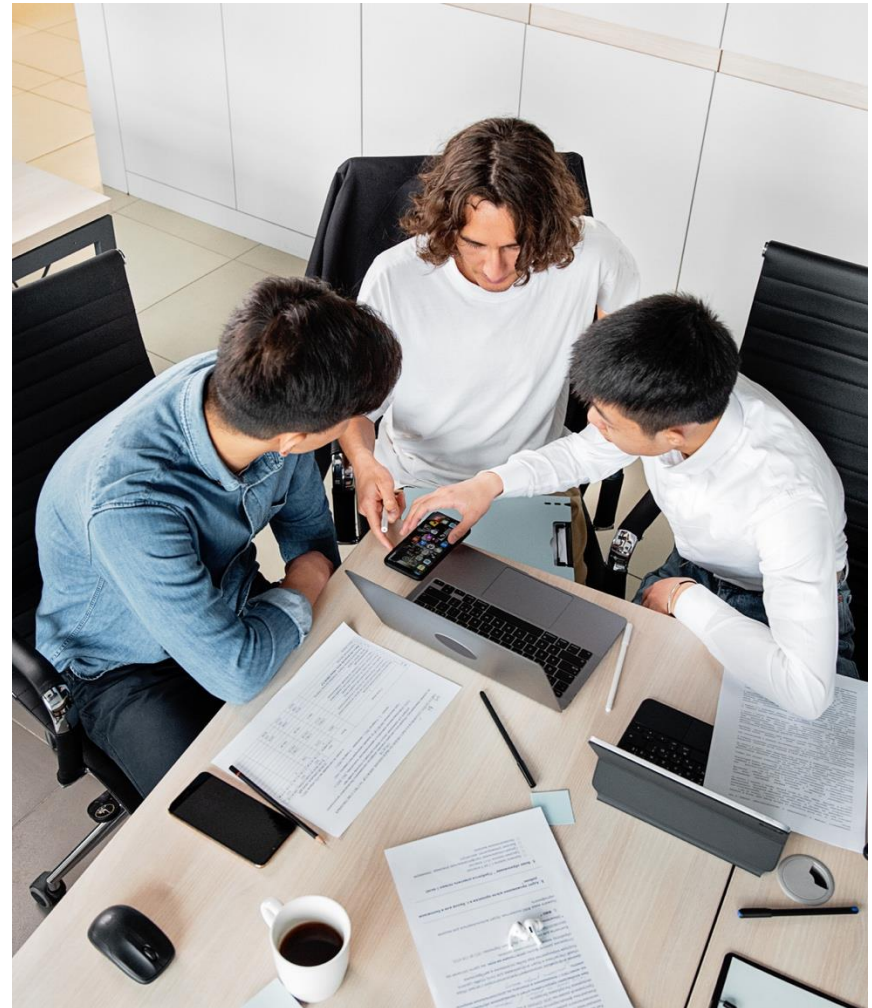
- Resistance is not an obstacle, it's data — an opportunity to learn about, and adapt, the change initiative.
- Leaders resist, just like other employees — sometimes unconsciously — with real consequences for the change.



TAKEAWAYS

Key Ideas

- Creating safe spaces for leaders and other employees to be vulnerable is critical to success.
- Opportunities for exchange, solution-generation, and critique need to be structured — something HR can facilitate, but leadership must ‘own’.





QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

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