

A CHECKLIST FOR HR LEADERS

Change resistance or change exhaustion?

7 questions to find out what's really slowing your transformation down

When a transformation stalls, the first diagnosis is usually resistance. People don't get it. They don't want it. They need to be convinced.

Sometimes that's true. But in many of the organizations I work with, what looks like resistance is something else: people who have been carrying change for so long that they have nothing left to give the next one.

The difference matters, because the two need opposite responses. Resistance responds to clarity, involvement and a good reason why. Exhaustion doesn't. If you answer exhaustion with more communication, more urgency and more pressure, you make it worse, and you usually lose some of your best people along the way.

74% → 43%

Employees' willingness to support enterprise change fell from 74% to 43%, while the number of planned changes they experienced grew fivefold.

Source: Gartner, 2016–2022

Resistance sounds like

"Why are we doing this?" "This won't work here."
"The old way was fine."

Exhaustion sounds like

"When are we supposed to do this?" "Not another one." Or, more often, silence.

How to use it. Answer for one team, function or business unit at a time, not the whole company. Tick the box when the answer is yes. Better still, answer it with two or three managers from that team. Their answers will tell you more than any engagement survey.

The 7 questions

- ☐ **1** **Has the number of changes landing on the same people grown over the last 12 to 18 months, while nothing has been taken off their plate?**

Look for: managers carrying three or more initiatives at once, and no initiative that was explicitly stopped to make room.

- ☐ **2** **Are your strongest people, the ones who usually say yes first, the ones now showing signs of fatigue?**

Look for: resistance tends to come from the skeptics. Exhaustion shows up in the early adopters who said yes to everything.

- ☐ **3** **Is the pushback about capacity ("when?") more than about direction ("why?")?**

Look for: people who agree with the strategy but keep asking for more time, more resources or clearer priorities.

- ☐ **4** **Are your managers forwarding the change to their teams instead of translating it?**

Look for: slides passed on unchanged, "this comes from above" language, and managers who privately have the same doubts as their teams. They are absorbing pressure from both sides.

- ☐ **5** **Has the quality of conversations and decisions dropped?**

Look for: shorter fuses, more escalations, everything treated as urgent, less curiosity in meetings. Under sustained pressure, people move into a threat response. They think more narrowly and react faster, exactly when the transformation needs judgment and creativity.

- ☐ **6** **Has every quarter become a peak, with no time to recover in between?**

Look for: one go-live running straight into the next, rising sick leave or regretted attrition, and high performers quietly updating their LinkedIn profiles.

- ☐ **7** **When senior leaders talk about the change, do they only talk about the benefits?**

Look for: communication that never acknowledges the effort it's asking of people. When the cost goes unspoken, people stop trusting the rest of the message.

What your answers are telling you

0–2 yes

Mostly resistance.

People have the energy; they don't yet have the reason. Focus on clarity, involvement and helping managers explain the why in their own words.

3–4 yes

Both are at play.

Some resistance, real fatigue underneath. Before adding anything new, decide what to sequence, slow down or stop.

5–7 yes

Change exhaustion.

Pushing harder will cost you performance and people. The priority is reducing load and building your leaders' capacity to lead under sustained pressure.

Three moves HR can make this quarter

- 1 Make the load visible.** Map every initiative landing on one team, including the "small" ones. Leadership teams are often surprised by the total, because no one sees it in one place.
- 2 Stop or sequence something, explicitly.** Ask the executive team to name what will not happen this quarter. People recover energy when they see something come off the plate, not when they are told to prioritize.
- 3 Equip managers to lead through it, not just to communicate it.** Managers carry the transformation to everyone else. They need to regulate their own pressure, have honest conversations about workload, and keep their teams thinking clearly when everything feels urgent.



Patricia Arboleda, Founder & CEO, Arboleda Consulting

I spent more than 25 years leading global teams inside Fortune 500 technology companies, through reorganizations, new strategies and more change than I can count. Today I help organizations build the human and leadership capabilities that transformation requires, combining real executive experience with applied neuroscience and behavioral change.

Did your team score 3 or more?

I'd welcome the conversation. Tell me what your organization is navigating, and we'll look together at what would make the biggest difference.

arboledaconsulting.com • patricia@arboledaconsulting.com