



# THE UNFAMILIAR TRUTH




## ABOUT RESISTANCE TO



## CHANGE IN SCHOOLS

*Luis F.  
Cruz*



Thirty years ago, I embarked on a personal and professional journey to work with students and families in public school settings. My journey began as a teacher; then I became an administrator, and today, I am an educational consultant and author. Three decades of working with amazing educators and students at every level—elementary, middle, and high school—have revealed two rather paradoxical conclusions:

1. The vast majority of public school educators are hardworking individuals who care deeply for their students.
2. The most challenging aspect associated with changing a school for improvement is not resistance from students but resistance from adults who work in the school.

This paradox begs the question, Why would hardworking educators who care deeply for the welfare of their students resist the changes needed to help more students be successful? The answer to this contradictory reality is best found not within the context of those refusing to change but more so with those leading the change process. Hence, resistance to change occurs mostly as a result of well-intended but nonetheless ineffective leadership.

In his best-selling book *Transforming School Culture*, Anthony Muhammad (2018) introduces readers to two types of resistance to change: logical and illogical. In our new book, *Time for Change: Four Essential Skills for Transformational School and District Leaders*, Muhammad and I (2019) further expand on the notion that resistance to change is found within both logical and illogical contexts

and therefore requires leaders—both administrators and teacher leaders alike—to develop and sharpen particular skill sets required to effectively address both.

Briefly, logical (also called rational) resistance to change is a result of individuals not understanding why a particular change initiative is needed, not trusting who the initiator of change is, and/or not understanding the particulars of how a specific plan for change is intended to be accomplished. As a result, genuine reasons why certain individuals may resist a call to change may sound like the following:

**“I have been grading essays this way for years. Why should I suddenly change my grading practices now?”**

**“This is our fourth principal in five years. Why should we invest time in changing our schedule if a new principal will probably be here next year?”**

**“I do not know how to use the new software aimed at better analyzing the results of our common assessments; therefore, I prefer not to do it!”**

Revelations such as these are indicative of resistance to change stemming from an unfulfilled need rather than an innate desire not to comply. Therefore, transformational leaders must be prepared to enact skill sets aimed at addressing logical resistance.

- **Why:** Use relevant data to persuade those expected to carry out change initiatives as a means of explaining the why behind the intent of leaders.
- **Who:** Approach those expected to initiate change in an empathetic and supportive manner to develop a strong sense of credibility and trust.
- **How:** Include those expected to carry out change initiatives in the problem-solving process and develop an environment conducive to adult learning to be better prepared to incrementally carry out particular change initiatives.

When leaders develop skill sets directly associated with logical reasons as to why individuals typically refuse to accept changes intended to better serve students and their families, less logical resistance to change will be experienced, leaving leaders with the task of confronting illogical (also referred to as irrational) resistance to change with tact and focus.

Illogical resistance to change stems from no observable need (why, who, how) to comply; it is the intrinsic desire to refute change for the sake of refuting change. This illogical response to change initiatives with the potential to better serve students and their families must not be ignored; rather, it must be addressed directly by using what we have developed as the RESIST protocol.

**R** Recognize that ignoring or deciding to avoid individuals who choose to resist change initiatives communicates to other adults in schools a lack of urgency or priority to follow through.

**E** Evaluate whether you as a leader have provided enough support in the form of why, who, and how.

**S** Select the language and location where this tactful confrontation will take place.

**I** Initiate the tactful confrontation and inquire whether the person has been provided enough support to accept the change initiative.

**S** Select your response. If it is revealed the person requires more support, then provide additional support. If it is revealed resistance to change exists regardless of the support provided, then a leader with positional authority (usually an administrator) must proceed to the next and final step.

**T** Tell the person who is unwilling to comply that refusal to accept and implement communicated change initiatives has led you to initiate professional monitoring of behavior until there is assurance that implementation of particular change initiatives will happen without the need to monitor.





Whether educational leaders are faced with the need to address logical or illogical forms of resistance relevant to helping students and their families better succeed, failure to effectively do so carries with it grave consequences for those we serve, such as perpetuating another cycle of generational poverty for poor students or entering a 21st century global economy without the knowledge and skills to effectively compete, to name a few. Leadership in schools must be evaluated not only on the merits of promoting collective problem-solving but also on the merits of how effectively we support others to embrace the uncomfortableness associated with implementation of necessary change. As my colleague and good friend Mike Mattos often reminds educators, “Ideas don’t help students, actions do.” ■

### References

Muhammad, A. (2018). *Transforming school culture: How to overcome staff division* (2nd ed.). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Muhammad, A., & Cruz, L. F. (2019). *Time for change: Four essential skills for transformational school and district leaders*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

**LUIS F. CRUZ, PHD**, has been a teacher and administrator at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. He is now an educational consultant and author.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you answer the question, Why would hardworking educators who care deeply for the welfare of their students resist the changes needed to help more students be successful?
2. What type of resistance do you see in your school? How do your leaders address it?
3. In what ways can team members address logical and illogical forms of resistance within the team?



## Call for Submissions

Do you have a PLC Story?  
Our readers want to hear it.

Being involved in a PLC means following proven processes, but what we really want to hear about is your personalized story. Your perspective. A specific telling about you or someone you know. An administrator, a teacher, or a student. Triumphs, failures, and the road between the two.

We're looking for:

Feature articles of 2,000–3,000 words

Articles about your school's PLC journey in 2,000–3,000 words

Or write for our Why I Love PLCs section in 500–700 words

Send your submissions or queries to: [MagSubmissions@SolutionTree.com](mailto:MagSubmissions@SolutionTree.com)