

## Dealing with Resistance in the Meeting

When people resist you or the data you are showing, it is a sign that something important is going on. Learning and change will always require some level of resistance. It is natural and people may not even be aware that they are doing it! Resistance is an indirect expression of an underlying concern. So, rather than trying to overcome resistance, try to understand where it is coming from. This can be hard to do, because we can easily get personally, get defensive, or start to resist ourselves!



Here is what resistance might look like:

**Arguing.** Participant(s) argues with your conclusions, with the data, or with you.

**Silence.** Participant(s) doesn't respond to questions or gives brief one-word answers.

**Questioning your methods.** Participant(s) questions the sources of your data, your interpretation of the data, the veracity of the information.

Tips for the facilitator:

1. **Use a check-in** to surface anything people are wrestling with even before the meeting begins. Sometimes resistance shows up because of something that has nothing to do with the topic at hand.
2. **Move towards the reaction.** The reaction means that something interesting is under the surface. If we shut it down, we may not find out what that is. So be curious, rather than defensive. "This point seems to have generated a lot of questions. What part is concerning, or feels off the mark for you?"
3. **Describe what you see happening in the room**, in a curious (non-judgemental) way. "We seem to have gotten stuck here. Two people are talking, and the rest of the group is silent. I am wondering what this means."
4. **Pay attention to the whole group**, not just one resistant person. We can get caught up trying to convince one person who is arguing and leaving the rest of the group behind.
5. **Create opportunities for choice.** Which part of this proposal do you personally want to dig into? Move into groups based on where you feel most energy."

When someone voices a real concern – even if we don't agree with it – that is not resistance. It is honesty! Thank them for expressing it, acknowledge that it was brave to voice it. You don't have to agree with it, and you don't need to jump in and fix it. Often, that is just what they need to move back to the business of the meeting.