

Why smart people resist new technology

by [Wayne Turmel](#)



Ahhhhh, technology! Brilliant minds work hard to create new, faster, better or easier ways to get our job done. Productivity goes up, seconds get shaved off tasks that add up to big savings in time, the company saves money, which in turn saves your job (work with me here, that's their story and we're going to accept it for the moment). Why, then, are smart, competent, usually motivated people so reluctant to adopt new workplace tools?

This is not a minor consideration. Each year millions of dollars and trillions of neurons are wasted rolling out workplace tools that people just don't adopt as quickly as they should. ('Should' in this context is something defined by the people rolling out the tool. The "roll-ees" think it's about right, or even going too quickly, so it's all a matter of perspective.)

Here are the five main reasons people don't adopt new tools as quickly as anticipated:

What we're doing already works. People are very good at learning and using tools that make their lives easier. The real challenge comes when what they are doing works, at least well enough. If there isn't a clearly perceived problem to be solved, and it isn't obvious that the new tool will provide that solution, it's going to be a tough sell.

I am competent with the old system, I might not be with the new one. When people feel "in the zone" they are engaged, productive and enthusiastic. Using unfamiliar technology or systems can put these people in an uncomfortable and unpleasant situation. It's natural to feel a little trepidation when doing something new, and it's even more natural for highly functioning workers to avoid putting themselves in that situation. It just feels better to do things the way we know how to do them, and if it's working.....

This change is all about "them", not us. It won't shock you to know that the financial well-being of the company is a secondary consideration for most workers. Yes, we want our employers to be successful, but many moves are seen as cynical "penny pinching" rather than really necessary. When technology changes are demanded by "the company," or "Home Office," or "IT," rather than driven by the day to day functions we are supposed to perform, our tendency is to be suspicious, slow to adapt, and over-cautious. Sometimes this is seen as anger or resentment. Depending on how ham-handed the rollout is, it often is anger and resentment.

We've seen this movie, and it's no fun. If you've been on this planet for any length of time, you've seen plenty of technology changes. You also remember the time wasted, frustration in learning the new tool, and the annoyance when it is inevitably replaced with something else.

Unless there is a compelling reason (or at least one we find personally compelling) to change, it's easier to keep things the way they are.

It's simple cost/benefit analysis. Whenever change is coming down the pipe, human beings ask themselves a simple question: Do the benefits of the new tool (time, money, ease of use, efficiency) outweigh the inevitable inconvenience (training time, confusion, rework) that comes with implementing any new system. Most people need some serious convincing. Statistics are nice, case studies are better, proof of concept with people we trust is the best. I don't care what "the industry" is doing, I want to know if Bob in Accounting is doing a better job and not pulling his hair out since his group went with the new tool. If water cooler buzz isn't positive, it's going to be a tough sell to the rest of the organization.

As you can see, the more someone has invested in the old way of doing things, the more they will resist the change. The problem is that those people are often the most productive, engaged and successful workers, with the most invested in keeping things the way they are.

Unless organizations, with the help of vendors, trainers and the like, understand why people will or won't use a technology, they will continue to struggle with getting the results they seek.

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