Surface Honest Resistance

Facilitator guide

Your job: bring out the unsaid objections through the honest-response prompts, read them neutrally without ever guessing who wrote what, cluster them by what they protect, and drive the fullest cluster into a rollout change. Your single most important job is holding the anonymity line — it is what makes the real objections sayable.

The one thing the team should learn: resistance isn't stubbornness — it's protection. You don't solve it by answering louder or re-explaining the change; you solve it by discovering what each objection is protecting, and changing the rollout to protect it too.

WHEN DO I USE THIS?

The right moment

GOOD FIT

A real change that's being resisted — a process change, reorg, tool migration, a new way of working — where the stated reasons don't fully explain the resistance.

WRONG TOOL

Hidden differences in what the team values › The Reveal. Hidden differences in what was heard › Echo Test. A change no one actually resists › you don't need this.

The one test before you start: does the stated objection feel like it doesn't fully add up? If the resistance is bigger than the reason given, there's an unspoken objection underneath — this is the tool. If everyone's genuinely on board, you don't need it.

WHAT WILL THE TEAM LEAVE WITH?

What you'll leave with

WHAT YOU GET

The real objections, surfaced — not the stated reasons. The hidden pattern behind them, named and clustered by what each protects. And one concrete change to the rollout, with an owner.

WHY IT MATTERS

The team stops seeing "difficult people" and starts seeing a common pattern it can address. An objection surfaces that no one had said out loud — and the room goes quiet when the real one goes up.

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PART 1 BEFORE THE ACTIVITY

get ready

1 · WHAT IS MY JOB HERE?

Your job

You are running this to one outcome: the real objection surfaced, clustered by what it protects, and a rollout change that protects it — with an owner. Your job is to:

- draw the unsaid objection out through the **honest-response prompts** — not "what's your objection?"
- read every card **neutrally** — never wince, argue, or guess who wrote it
- cluster by **what's protected**, never by topic or by who said it
- drive the fullest cluster into a **rollout change** — redesign, don't re-explain

THE ONE RULE

Anonymity is the tool. One attribution kills it. Fold, shuffle, read flat — and never guess, hint at, or let the room guess who wrote a card. The moment a card can be traced, the honest objections stop coming.

2 · WHO DOES WHAT?

Roles

Who	What they do
You (facilitator)	Run the flow, read every card aloud neutrally, hold the anonymity line, cluster by what's protected, and drive one rollout change. You **never** argue an objection or guess who wrote it.
Participants (a team)	The people who'll live with the change. Respond privately and anonymously, then cluster the cards as a team and help redesign the rollout.

Say this to the team before you start (in your own words): "We've got a change that people are resisting, and the stated reasons don't fully explain why. We're going to surface the real objections anonymously — through written prompts, not open discussion. Then we'll sort them by what each person is protecting — status, competence, workload, control, or habit / routine — and change the rollout to address what we find. About an hour."

3 · HOW DO I START?

Opening script — 2 minutes

Say this in your own words. Do not read the app page out loud.

SAY

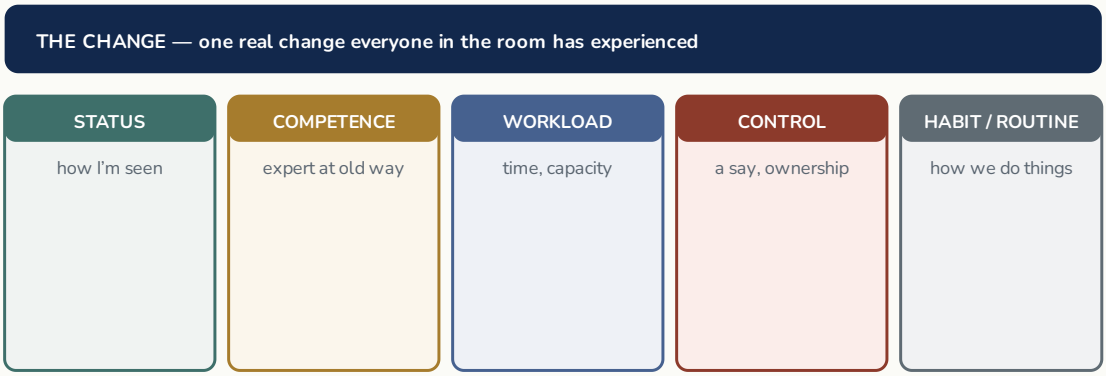
"Everyone here says they support this change — yet it's not happening. Usually that's because the real objection feels unsafe to say out loud. So instead of open discussion, you'll each write — anonymously — what you'd say if it were completely safe. I'll shuffle and read them flat, with no idea who wrote what. Then we find the pattern together."

4 · HOW DO I PREPARE?

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Setup and materials

THE PROTECT-CATEGORIES BOARD — FIVE ZONES, CLUSTER BY WHAT'S PROTECTED



Each anonymous card goes in the zone it protects — the fullest zone is the real blocker.

Kit: Honest Response Cards, protect-prompt cards, identical pens (anonymity is the whole mechanism).

What	Why it's there
One resisted change, named	A real, current change everyone in the room has experienced — or a starter-change card if the group has none of its own. This is the critical ingredient.
The Honest Response Cards	Write-on cards with prompts that surface the unsaid thing indirectly. One response per card, anonymous.
The protect-categories board	Five zones — status, competence, workload, control, habit / routine — to cluster by what each protects.
Plain identical pens	So no handwriting can be traced. The anonymity is the whole mechanism.

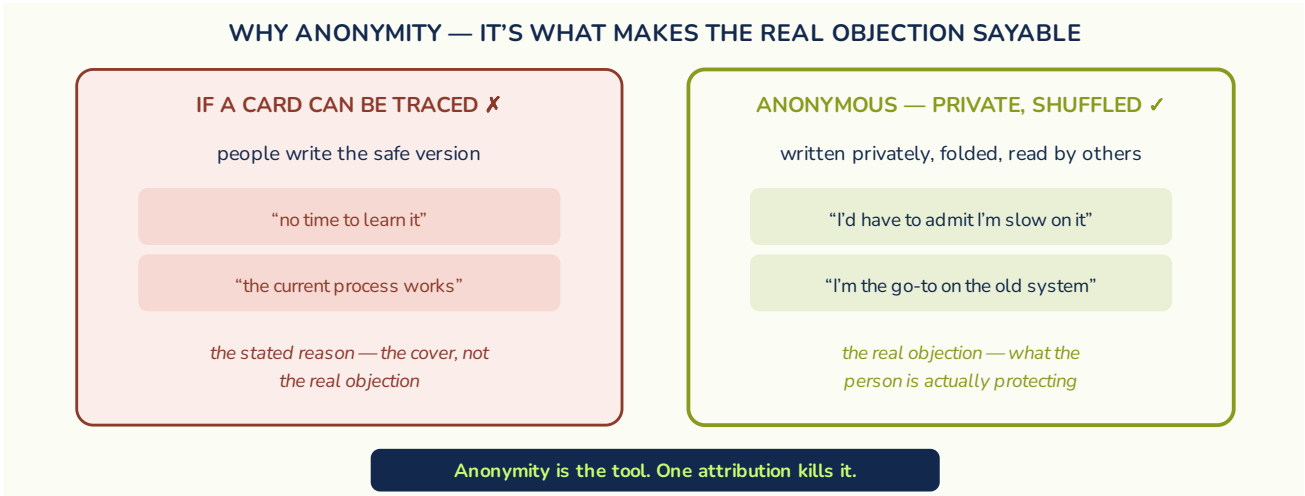
> **Get the right people in the room.** The people who'll actually live with the change. 45–60 minutes, a team and one facilitator. Protect step 2 (the private write) and step 5 (the redesign) above all.

5 · WHAT IS THE ONE SETUP MOVE?

Hold the anonymity line — the move it all rests on

This tool lives or dies on one thing: every response is written privately, folded, shuffled, and read by someone other than its author — with no one ever guessing who wrote what. Anonymity brings the real objection out; the moment a card can be traced, people write the safe version instead.

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Neutral delivery is the anonymity line in action. If you wince, agree, or argue with a card, you teach the room that honesty has a cost — and the next person writes the cover story. Read the hardest card in exactly the same flat tone as the easiest.

PART 2 DURING THE ACTIVITY

run it

Before you begin — 30-second check

- ✓ The change is real, current, and genuinely resisted — the stated reason doesn't fully add up
- ✓ The people who'll live with the change are in the room
- ✓ Identical pens out; the board's five zones are visible; cards ready
- ✓ You are ready to read every card flat — and never guess who wrote it

6 · WHAT DO I DO NOW?

Run the activity

Name the change › Surface, privately › Read aloud, neutrally › Cluster by what's protected › Redesign & commit

1. Name the change
4–5 min

Appoint a facilitator first. Write one real change everyone in the room has experienced, in a sentence.

2. Surface, privately
9–11 min

Everyone completes the honest-response prompts on cards — anonymously, one response per card. Write what you'd say if it were safe.

> **One concern per card. Don't discuss while writing.** Use the indirect prompts, not "what's your objection?" — they back people into it indirectly. Identical pens; fold cards as you finish.

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3. Read aloud, neutrally

11–13 min

Do not discuss individual cards. The facilitator collects every response, shuffles the cards, then reads every card aloud and posts it — no defending, no reacting, no guessing who wrote it.

> **Neutral delivery is doing the work.** Read the hardest card in the same flat tone as the easiest.

4. Cluster by what's protected

12–14 min

Ask: "What is this person trying to avoid losing?" Place the card in the category that best answers that — status, competence, workload, control, habit / routine. The fullest zones are the real blockers. If two clusters are equally large, choose the one most likely to block adoption if left unaddressed.

> **Don't solve or debate while clustering. First, understand the pattern.** Solutions come only in step 5. Never cluster by topic or by who said it.

5. Redesign and commit

12–14 min

Take the largest cluster and change the rollout to address what it protects — not just re-explain the change. If the biggest cluster is still left unaddressed, the rollout hasn't changed. Commit one change, with an owner.

> **The bridge from cluster to action:** "what is one change to the rollout that would protect this concern without abandoning the change?" That question turns a named pattern into a concrete move.

Use this while you cluster (step 4). *For each card, ask: "what would this person most hate to lose here?" Cluster by what's protected, not by surface theme — "the new system is clunky" might be protecting competence (I'm an expert on the old one), not workload.*

If the objection is really about…	It protects	The tell
how capable or senior I look	**Status**	"others will see me struggle / lose standing"
being expert at the current way	**Competence**	"I'm good at the old way; I start again as a beginner"
time, effort or capacity	**Workload**	"I absorb more work, at least at first"
a say, a choice, ownership	**Control**	"a decision I held moves to someone / a process"
routine, comfort, identity	**Habit / routine**	"this isn't how we are / how we do things here"

> **If a card could fit two zones:** place it where the loss is sharpest. A card that genuinely spans two is a strong signal — note it in both. Never cluster by who might have said it.

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These times are indicative and will depend on the nature of the problem and the size of the team. Protect step 2 (the private write) and step 5 (the redesign). If you run out of time, a named real objection with one rollout change beats a full board with no change made.

While you run — when to step in, when to stay out · a principle, not a step

STEP IN

Someone starts to say their card aloud → hold it; write first.

Clustering drifts to "who wrote this?" → redirect to what it protects.

The team clusters by topic → ask what it protects instead.

The team stops at the reveal → drive one rollout change.

STAY OUT

The room goes quiet at a hard card → let it land; keep reading.

A card genuinely spans two zones → note it in both.

People debate which zone a card protects → that's the work.

A senior voice wants to rebut a card → don't allow it; surface, don't argue.

The clearest tell it's working: an objection surfaces that no one had said in the open meeting — and the room goes quiet when it goes up. That quiet is the real objection arriving. Don't fill it; let it land, then keep reading.

PART 3 AFTER THE ACTIVITY

make it stick

7 · HOW DO I FINISH?

Closing script — 2 minutes

SAY

"Look at the board. The reason we kept arguing about wasn't the real one — the fullest cluster is. We're not going to answer it louder; we're changing the rollout so it protects what that cluster is guarding. One change, one owner, this week. That's how resistance moves — not by pushing harder, but by protecting what people were quietly defending."

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8 · DID WE GET A GOOD RESULT?

Check your run

DONE WELL

At least one unspoken objection surfaced; the team named what the fullest cluster protects; the rollout was changed — not just re-explained; one change left the room with an owner.

A HOLLOW RUN

All “safe” objections (anonymity wasn’t trusted); clustered by who-said-it or by topic; the team understood the real objection and then just re-explained the change. Nothing in the rollout changed.

WHAT A GOOD RUN PRODUCES



You don’t solve resistance by answering louder — you change the rollout to protect what the cluster guards.

a named real objection with one rollout change beats a full board with no change made

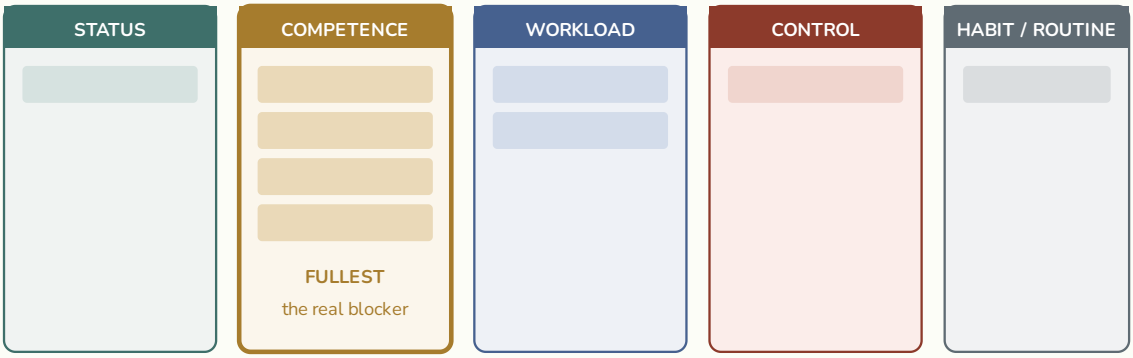
9 · WHY DOES THIS WORK?

The idea underneath

Most people won’t openly admit what they’re worried about if it could make them look weak, resistant or selfish — so they argue the stated reason and the change stalls. Anonymity removes the cost of honesty; the prompts get past the prepared explanation to the protected thing; and clustering by what’s protected turns many separate complaints into one pattern. The objection was never a misunderstanding — so re-explaining can’t fix it. You change the rollout to protect what the cluster guards.

THE FULLEST ZONE IS THE REAL BLOCKER

not the reason the team kept arguing about



The “no time” story was protecting competence — not workload. Cluster by what’s protected, never by who said it.

Before people leave — the finish check

- ✓ Every response was written privately, folded, shuffled, and read by others
- ✓ No card was ever traced — anonymity held all the way through
- ✓ Cards were clustered by what they protect, never by who or by topic
- ✓ The team named what the fullest cluster protects
- ✓ The rollout was changed to protect it — not just re-explained
- ✓ One change left the room with an owner

10 · HOW DO I MAKE THIS A HABIT?

Build the habit — 30 seconds

THE HABIT

“Before fighting a stated objection, ask: what is this person actually protecting — status, competence, workload, control or habit / routine?”

The lasting change: the team stops treating resistance as stubbornness to be argued down, and starts asking what each objection is guarding. You don’t solve resistance by answering louder — you solve it by protecting what the objection defends.

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Appendix · Reference

You should not need this while you run the activity. Read it before, or use it if something goes wrong.

11 · THE HONEST-RESPONSE PROMPTS

Induce, don't request

These go on the cards. They work because they don't ask people to name what they're protecting — they bring it out indirectly, so the answer reveals the protected thing without anyone having to confess it. Keep them induced (indirect), never direct ("what's your objection?") — direct prompts get the cover story back.

The prompt	What it brings out
"The part of this change I'd be quietly relieved if someone cancelled is…"	What the person is protecting — the thing they'd lose.
"If this change disappeared tomorrow, the thing I'd miss least is…"	The hidden cost, named without blame.
"The thing I hope leadership hasn't noticed about this is…"	The objection that feels unsafe to raise directly.

Keep it out of therapy. Every response has to land on the board — status, competence, workload, control, habit / routine. If a card is pure venting that protects nothing actionable, it can't be clustered or redesigned around. The purpose is to redesign the rollout, not to hold a session about emotions.

12 · A WORKED RUN

Watch the facilitator move

The change: "we're replacing the old reporting system with the new platform." Resisted for weeks; stated reason: "no time to learn it."

Card (read flat) "…relieved if cancelled: not having to admit I'm slow on the new one."
Card (read flat) "…hope they haven't noticed: I'm the go-to person for the old system."
Facilitator (the room goes quiet at the 'go-to person' card) — doesn't fill the silence or react; lets it land, then keeps reading.

What the facilitator does: after the quiet, asks the room — "looking only at what we've heard, what do these cards seem to be protecting?" Three cards land in competence — not workload. The 'no time' story was protecting expertise. The redesign: "pair each expert with the new tool for two weeks before go-live, so they're the expert again by launch." Owner: Priya. The redesign protected competence directly, instead of re-explaining the change.

13 · WHAT IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG?

Recovery guide & participant lines

What happens	What to do
All cards are "safe" objections	Anonymity isn't trusted yet. Collect the cards again, reassure (identical pens, you read them), remind them no one will be identified. Consider re-running step 2.

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Nobody writes anything meaningful	Remind the team this isn't anonymous feedback to leadership — it's about protecting something they'd personally lose. Re-read a prompt aloud: "the part I'd be relieved if someone cancelled is…" Give it a moment; the first honest card usually unlocks the rest.
Clustering shifts to who-said-it	Redirect hard: "We don't guess who. Only what it protects." This is the line that keeps the tool safe — hold it every time.
The team stops at the reveal, makes no change	The redesign step was squeezed. Take only the fullest cluster and make one rollout change with an owner — not a perfect plan.
A card is pure venting, protects nothing	Acknowledge it, but it can't be clustered. Ask "what's the change underneath this?" If nothing actionable, set it aside.
A senior person tries to rebut an objection	Hold the rule: "We surface and address — we don't argue them away." Arguing a card kills the honesty for everyone.
Two clusters are equally full	Choose the one most likely to block adoption if left unaddressed; name the second for follow-up.

Lines that stall the run — kept handy: "Can we discuss it openly instead?" → "After the cards — open first gets the stated reason." · "I think I know who wrote that" → "We don't go there." · "That objection is wrong" → "We're not judging — we're finding what it protects." · "Just explain it better" → "If it were a misunderstanding, would it keep coming back?"

14 · WHAT GOES WRONG MOST OFTEN?

Common mistakes

Mistake	Why it kills the run
Letting a card be traced	One guess at who wrote something and the honest objections stop — anonymity is the whole mechanism.
Reacting to a hard card	A wince or a rebuttal teaches the room that honesty costs; read every card in the same flat tone.
Clustering by topic, not by what's protected	The surface theme hides the real blocker; cluster by what each objection guards.
Re-explaining instead of redesigning	The objection was never a misunderstanding — change the rollout, not the pitch.

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15 · WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

Where this sits in the Gym

Three tools surface hidden things in a team. Reach for the one that matches what's hidden.

What's hidden	Use this
hidden objections to a change — what's being protected	**Surface Honest Resistance** (this tool) — the real objection nobody says out loud.
hidden differences in what the team values	**The Reveal** — surfaces where priorities silently differ.
hidden differences in what was heard	**Echo Test** — surfaces where the same message was understood differently.

Rule of thumb: Surface Honest Resistance asks "what is each person protecting in this change?" The Reveal asks "do we actually value the same things?" Echo Test asks "did we hear the same thing?" Different hidden gaps, different tools.

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