

Managing Resistance to Change

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Introduction

Change is necessary and inevitable. The quality movement, continuous improvement, action learning organizations, advanced technology, competition, new consumer media, new distribution methodologies, etc., all alter the landscape of the familiar. With each new day, customer and financial markets, the environment, and most everything else about our business is no longer the same. Managing in such tenuous landscapes is often confusing and managing any change initiative while the ground swells is sometimes overwhelming. Sustaining competitive advantage or parity is increasingly complex as is the effect organizational change has on its people. Managers must understand the escalating effects change (strategic, technological and/or structural) has on the organization and its many parts, including individuals.

Unfortunately, as change is inevitable, so is the tendency for workers to feel the change as an indictment of their performance or an unnecessary whim of their management. Employees quickly move to *blame* management for the loss of comfortable roles and tasks, seniority, income and, sometimes, jobs rather than take up the challenge of change. As agents of change, we are held responsible by our employees and the other major stakeholders in our business to undertake these changes in as thoughtful and integrated way as possible. Managing any change process is never easy and is a continuous part of organizational life.

William Bridges, in his book *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, addresses the individual's experience of change. According to Bridges, our personal and professional ability to handle change is affected by our culture's lack of attention to *transitions*. He writes:

“...in the modern world...transition is a kind of street-crossing procedure. One would be a fool to stay out there in the middle of the street any longer than necessary, so once you step off the curb, move on to the other side as fast as you can. And whatever you do, don't sit down on the center-line to think things over!

No wonder we have so much difficulty with our transitions. This view makes no sense out of the pain of ending, for all that we can imagine is that our distress is a sign that we should not have crossed the street in the first place. It also makes no sense out of the feeling of lostness that we are likely to experience or the feeling that the emptiness seems to stretch on forever. ('Wait a minute,' we want to object. 'There *is* another side to this street, isn't there?)"²

Change is far more complex than a street crossing. It is a challenging journey towards an uncertain destination. Transitions are journeys that we each need to come to terms with. By shoving people into traffic and simply pointing to an imagined “other side”, we can be sure of one thing -- we will increase a person's anxiety and their *resistance*.

Managing Resistance to Change is a methodology that is designed to help people in organizations face resistance and cross the street -- to actually *manage* the transitions experienced within organizational change.

² Bridges, W., *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1980, p. 113.

Managing Resistance to Change

The *Managing Resistance to Change* workshop has been in development for over two years and has included consultants, managers, workers, executives and clinicians as participants. We have conducted it publicly with mixed audiences, for a major consulting firm, two corporations and continue to develop it in-house at a large hi-tech manufacturer. The following highlights our approach and the results we have experienced in the workshop.

Change in organizations is a constant, albeit discontinuous (Lewin, Nadler), process. Organizations are continually immersed in transition. And, since change is an inevitable part of organizational life, we believe that *resistance* is correspondingly inherent and should be reframed, explored and worked, not eradicated or “fixed”. In fact, we have found that the process of surfacing and discussing resistance is a part of the learning that all organizations must do to survive. The “data” of resistance is critical to an organization’s development, productivity and ability to make change successful.

The objectives for our workshop participants are simple:

- Learn to:
 - Help yourself and others identify and talk about the feelings that are at the core of resistance, and
 - Use the energy bound up in resistance to further change.
- Develop and practice the skills needed to use this process.
- Refine a personal strategy for managing resistance to change.
- Understand what is in your control to change and what actions to take.
- Provide a safe place to stop, reflect on and explore our thoughts and feelings and learn from each other.

One of the first learning often expressed by workshop participants is that *they* “resist”. Most participants enter believing that they will learn how to manage others’ resistance rather than look at how they participate. It is our belief that resistance is not just a personal process but systemic in nature. We all contribute to and are a part of the “resistance” experienced and observed. Resistance occurs at individual, interpersonal and group levels simultaneously. We must stop and see not only how others “resist” but how we resist and how the process of resistance serves a purpose for the organization.

As the objectives stated above suggest, the workshop combines didactic learning with experiential process. As you read the following material, think about yourself and how this discussion might apply to your own situation.

The workshop begins with a series of exercises that help us define our own and others’ resistance. Since our response to change is deeply set by our life’s experience, as Bridges describes, we begin with the self and one’s own pattern or valence for resistance. We ask our participants to think about how their current organizational role was shaped by the role they assumed in their family of origin. Each individual explores the following:

- Her/his (technical) role in their organization.

- Her/his role in their family of origin. (Participants are asked to put a name to how they functioned as a child and adolescent. Were they a rebel, caretaker, good student or prankster, to name a few?)
- How they take-up their role in the organization. (Participants are now asked to put a name to how they currently take-up their role at work. Are they the rebel, caretaker, good worker or prankster?)
- Something unique about themselves that they don't normally share.

Once individuals have had a couple of opportunities to experience their own resistance, we ask participants to define resistance as they see it operate in organizations. We generally fill a wall with examples of how participants observe and experience resistance in organizations. To date, we have close to 30 “walls-of-resistance” documented that give the same message -- resistant behavior in organizations is experienced as a negative, harmful and destructive force that is highly individualized and can generate physical, emotional and psychological depletion -- certainly our experience of resistance is something to escape, get rid of, lop off. Quite a place to start a workshop...

Any Change Stirs Up Resistance

As we move the workshop into the first “lecturette”, we are surrounded by personal expressions and experiences of resistance. The participants already understand the nature of resistance and its destructive powers. Our challenge, as stated in the objectives, is to reframe this energy and help the participants turn the inevitable process of change and the resulting resistance into a productive organizational experience.

Yes, *any* change stirs up resistance. Examples are everywhere:

- People trained in problem solving and/or statistical tools who do not use them;
- People saying yes when asked to complete a task and then not doing it or avoiding it;
- A “team” that resists confronting a particular member’s not “getting with the program”;
- Supervisors who continue to control processes and people and can’t seem to let go;
- Management postponing training or cutting back on “key” programs;
- People saying “this will never work” or “it works already, so why do we have to change it” or “the company’s making money, why do we have to change?” or “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”, and so on.
- Our reluctance to speak with someone who we are afraid of or who appears to oppose us.

The dictionary definition of resistance, “an opposing or retarding force”, is consistent with the workshop’s “wall of resistance” and the “walls” encountered in most change efforts -- those invisible walls that all change initiatives experience at some point, regardless of the merits of the change. We think about resistance as both a driving *and* restraining force (Lewin, Agazarian).

Much as Peter Senge talks about in *The Fifth Discipline*³ in his discussion about “personal mastery”, when we walk towards our goal, we immediately face the tension of resistance (as if a rubber band is tied around our waist and attached to the opposing wall) that is tied to our belief in our own “powerlessness or unworthiness”. We view the two opposing forces as our *past/present* individual and organizational beliefs and our *future* individual and organizational goal(s). As we move towards our goal, the tension of that rubber band tied around our waist and to the opposing wall (our past/present) pulls us back and as we turn in response to our past and present belief systems, culture, familiarity, the tension of not meeting our future goal tugs in the opposite direction. We find ourselves stuck in the middle of this transition (Bridge’s “neutral zone” or middle of the street with oncoming traffic from both directions) unable to find solace in our past or present system in which we live and unable to move forward to the promising future. This, in our experience, *is* resistance.

We hear much talk about “change” management these days and change processes. Realignment, re-engineering, reorganization, mergers and acquisitions, and the many more processes being implemented to “transform” organizations today tend to inadvertently increase the amount of resistance in the organization, often inhibiting the effort and increasing the resource and financial costs. Some organizations declare that employees must make a choice and either “get on the train or wind up under it” or “lead, follow or get out of the way”, others declare that “no one will lose their job” and still others plan change with a few “dependable” individuals and expect the

³ New York: Doubleday/Currency, 1990, p. 157.

masses will implement -- resistance to these change methodologies is obvious. Still, even in the most socially conscious change efforts, resistance appears to cause unplanned ripples that often swell to tidal waves. Change, then, would be easy if it were not for the *people*...it is our belief that any change effort must consider all that is known about the *social* aspects of the change, in addition to the technical, in order to be successful.

Resistance, as we've observed it, comes in two varieties, overt and covert. *Overt resistance* is the most noticeable; it is what we experience as obvious opposition, disagreement, arguing, debating, etc., to any change effort. It's most virulent form is when people say "No!" and flatly refuse to go along with or implement change. *Covert resistance* comes in two forms: conscious and unconscious. *Conscious covert resistance* appears when employees are concerned about the consequences of their actions. People sometimes covertly resist by saying yes or apparently agreeing to a change and then avoiding or delaying its implementation. *Unconscious covert resistance* is the most difficult to see and understand. It is when we are not even aware of our resistance. When we have trouble understanding or "hearing" another, "forget", fail to achieve expected results, become ineffective, become ill, avoid for no apparent reason, etc., we may be unconsciously resisting the process of change. Covert resistance provides no visible conflict or discord yet just as successfully undermines change efforts as when overt processes are at work.

Fear of Loss

At the heart of resistance is our *fear of loss*. Resistance is a result of this fear, an expression of how people feel about the change effort at hand. When things change, people begin to worry about what they might lose, including ⁴:

- Job
- Income
- Position/Status
- Reputation
- Turf
- Influence
- Responsibility
- Expertise
- Certainty/Security
- Autonomy/Control/Freedom of Choice
- Effectiveness
- Routines/Familiar Procedures
- Relationships/Mentors/Group Membership
- Meaning
- Future/Dreams/Plans
- Identity

This list is not comprehensive; we can all think of more losses that we face, rationally and otherwise, when confronted with change. These losses *are real* -- real feelings that are stirred when confronted with letting go with the *known* during a transition. We have come to understand how this fear of loss disables our ability to be fully dedicated to any change.

In addition to the emotions connected to these losses, most also reflect a real *technical shift*. We believe that any change ultimately affects the various “boundaries” within an organization. By boundaries ⁵, we refer to the technical, formal and informal structures that can be summarized into three categories: roles, tasks and authority ⁶. The alignment of these boundaries is what becomes skewed during any change process and most organizations in transition do not spend much time thinking about how the intended or implemented change impacts role, task and authority boundaries, particularly in a dynamic sense. Resistance, then, is the way we protect ourselves from the binds caused by boundary shifts. The key to working with resistance lies in the ability of an organization to understand and define the shifts in role, task and authority associated with any change.

⁴ Adapted from Bridges, W., *Managing Transitions*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991.

⁵ Groups have multiple **boundaries** which effect roles, dynamics, process and task. Boundaries differentiate people and groups and are the borders or structure between people, functions, groups, tasks, processes, reality, etc., and can be either defined or undefined. Boundaries are defined by geography, time, role, goal, task, etc. Productivity is enhanced and resistance diminished when boundaries are clearly defined.

⁶ A **role** is the position and place a person assumes in an organization by assignment (the tasks they are expected to perform) or as a product of some “dynamic” (perhaps related to their gender, age, position, looks, etc.).

A **task** is the act of producing or achieving an output, which is required by the work of the individual and group. A **process** is the known or unknown means by which tasks get accomplished.

Authority refers to the official hierarchy of an organization and the structure of power within it, i.e., how roles and tasks are authorized, how teams are sanctioned, what decision-making authority an individual or group has.

Talking about Our Fears

There is, however, resistance to talking about resistance. We are confident that most people could resolve their boundary differences and *manage* their resistance to change if they could only find a means to talk about it. We spend considerable time in the workshop helping individuals express their feelings, fear of loss and the resulting binds that are at the heart of resistance. In this work, we have faced the reality that in most organizations talking about such things as losses, fears and feelings are *taboo*!

The trick then (if there is such a thing) is to help people in organizations find ways to talk about the feelings stirred by change. These feelings are an important data set for understanding the nature of resistance and learning about the organizational system. We have found it helpful in most systems to simply name these losses and fears. For most people resisting a change, it is liberating to be able to list words that describe their discomfort, such as uneasiness, anxiety, fear, distrust, resentment, anger, self-doubt, vulnerability, helplessness, lack of motivation, impotence and so on. This begins the process of talking about what we all experience when in transitional binds.

Too often, our impulse when facing a “resistor” is to *talk them out of their resistance*. Frequently, consultants, executives, managers and the like, believe that the best way out of resistance is to explain, in ever more detail, why change is necessary. This process, rather than alleviate the stress of change, adds to it, making most recipients of such cool logic feel more anxious, unsettled and not understood or heard. Our natural impulse to explain away a change only adds to others’ resistance and can be considered symptomatic of our own resistance.

Peter Block nicely summarizes this process, as follows ⁷:

“There is no way you can talk clients out of their resistance, because resistance is an emotional process. Behind the resistance are certain feelings. You cannot talk people out of how they are feeling...

The basic strategy is to help the resistance blow itself out, like a storm, and not to fight the resistance head-on.

Feelings pass and change when they get expressed directly. The skill for the consultant is to ask clients to put directly into words what the client is experiencing — to ask the client to be authentic. The most effective way to encourage the client to be authentic is for the consultant to also behave authentically. That’s all there is to it.”

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Block, P., *Flawless Consulting*, Austin: Learning Concepts, 1981, Page 131.

A Methodology for Talking about Resistance

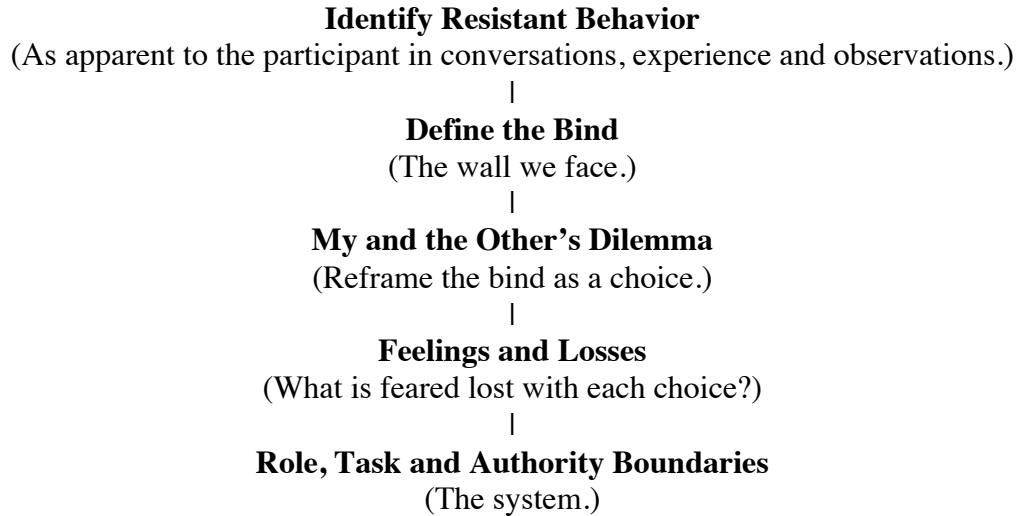
Authenticity and simply talking about our feelings is hard to put to practice. Our workshop provides a number of tools and techniques to help individuals and organizations sort through, explore and express the feelings that are at the heart of resistance -- we essentially provide a methodology to begin the process of being authentic. We take a case approach to learning about resistance, asking participants to document their experiences of resistance in a particular conversation or situation. Participants move from this frustrating conversation or interaction with another person to begin seeing their own, in addition to the other's resistance.

We begin by asking participants to note what they were *really thinking* during a conversation -- a portion of their conversation where they were reluctant (resistant) to say what they were actually thinking. They are asked to imagine saying what they were thinking and to describe how this makes them feel. We then examine how what was actually said protected the person from the discomfort and loss (an indication of resistance) that they might feel if they were more authentic.

Now that one has surfaced their own resistance, we ask them to think about the dilemma that the other might face. This is another of our key learning that another name for resistance is an impasse or *bind* and when facing a bind, the only way out is to reframe it as a choice, a fork in the road. Our preferred metaphor for this choice is the "horns of a dilemma". We spend much time in the workshop learning how to reframe participant examples of resistance into dilemmas in which there are choices with consequences. Participants are asked to list what might be feared lost by making each choice. They diagram dilemmas as a way of clearly delineating another's and their own resistance, bind and dilemma. Once the person has explored the other's dilemma, we ask that the participant diagram and express the dilemma in which they find themselves. Participants work to find ways to express their dilemma to the other in a non-judgmental, non-blaming way. We then test their response by exploring, again, how they feel now that they have expressed their dilemma.

Expressing the other's dilemma and exploring their potential losses and feelings, helps us get in touch with our empathy for the other's position. Embracing an empathic viewpoint enables us to move beyond blaming, judging, anger, etc., to a place where we can be real. Expressing our dilemma helps us manage our resistance to being authentic, encouraging the other to be authentic as well.

Our work, however, does not stop here. The expression of each party's dilemma and the losses associated with each choice is the first part of a two-part process for working with resistance. In order to take this process and make it actionable, we must be sure to use the dilemmas and losses as data -- symptoms of a problem in the system. Dilemmas are then looked at in the context of the organization. System issues of role, task and authority boundaries are explored, the issues that are at the root of most binds/resistance. In summary, we work each case in the following process:



One tool that we have found useful in looking at the “language” of resistance is summarized in the following chart (*see Page 8*) that describes the driving and restraining forces in our communications ⁸. Driving forces are those phrases and language that help improve situations, working through resistance. Restraining forces are the language of resistance; when one uses restraining force language and behavior, they are in the resistance.

⁸ Adapted from Agazarian, Y. M., who adapted her work from K. Lewin’s Field Theory using (a) the “SAVI System for Analyzing Verbal Interaction” (Agazarian and Simon, 1967) and (b) “Theory of Living Systems” (Agazarian, 1992).

Driving Forces Restraining Forces

Asking Direct Questions	Asking Indirect, Leading and Sarcastic Questions
Answering Questions	Avoiding Answering/Deflecting Changing the Subject Answering a Question With a Question
Building on Ideas	Preempting Ideas Yes-Butting Interrupting
Proposing	Blaming and Complaining
Working With/From One's Own Feelings	Staying in Your Head/Intellectualizing Using "Hot" or Extreme Language Labeling/Interpreting
Owning One's Own Feelings	Putting Yourself Down
Describing What Is Experienced	Oughtituding
Exploring	Explaining
Checking Out Whether Someone Is Thinking What You Think They Think	Mind Reading
Understanding What Is Known About the Future and Discriminating the Present From the Past	Negative Predictions
Discriminating Differences and Similarities	Ambiguity
Discriminating Similarities in the Apparently Different and Differences in the Apparently Similar	Contradictions
Integrating Information in New Ways	Redundancy
Taking Responsibility and Owning the Role/Task	Disowning/Depending on Others/Detachment
Staying With Your Own Experience	Moving to Another Place, Person and/or Time
Development	Fixation
Growth; Continuous Learning/Improvement	Stagnate; Block; Control

Understanding and Communicating Dilemmas

We have referred to the concept of a “dilemma” repeatedly in the previous pages. Dilemmas serve two purposes in helping us understand and work with resistance. First, reframing a bind in the form of a dilemma allows one to “de-toxify” the issue they face as a series of choices that have related consequences. This reframing provides perspective to the problem and allows cooler heads and some “rational” process to emerge. Second, mapping or diagramming dilemmas provides a road map for understanding systemic issues; a diagnostic tool in which common organizational themes can be understood. Once these themes are surfaced, valuable insights into the organizational system and its change process can be gained.

The following binds and dilemmas are from various workshops and serve as examples of how often simple changes in role, task and authority create binds and dilemmas for people, resulting in resistance. Do they sound familiar?

Binds

- Group leaders, supervisors and middle managers perceive themselves as being asked to give primary leadership to a change to a “quality culture” that will have *both* negative and beneficial consequences for their employees.
- Middle managers and supervisors experience a “classic” paradox for companies undergoing change, particularly when changing to data-based decision making and delegated responsibility and accountability:
 - If we lead, we stir up negative feelings, anxiety and resistance.
 - If we don’t, the work and the company suffers, and we stir up negative feelings, anxiety and resistance.
- The performance appraisal system still rewards individual, rather than team performance.
- The measurement systems upon which individual performance is evaluated often do not reflect, measure and reward the new tasks and behaviors that people are being asked to do and exhibit in the new *quality* culture.
- The job evaluation and seniority processes reduce supervisor and manager flexibility in organizing teams and rewarding new behavior.
- As in most TQM culture change efforts, the goals of the change and the vision of the future is unclear, resulting in supervisors and managers having difficulty understanding the change and explaining it to their people.
- Senior management, most of whom have little experience managing or participating in a *quality* culture, are unsure of how to behave, have their own dilemmas and, consequently, do not always serve as a consistent role model.

- Most employees experience organizational change as imposed upon them by senior management rather than jointly developed with them as is often the case in participative total quality processes. People experience communication about change as one way.
- Group leaders, supervisors and middle managers feel that they are asked to lead the change to a “quality culture” while many of the management systems and managerial role models available to them contradict their efforts and send the opposite message.

Dilemmas

Situation I’m asked to support the shift to data-based decision making AND to uphold the Company’s commitment to its people as an important value.

Dilemma If I don’t have the resources to retrain my people, they’ll be let go in favor of people with better analytic skills AND I won’t be able to fulfill my commitment to my existing people. Also, if I defend my people to my management team, I’m perceived as disloyal -- as resisting the shift to data-based decision-making.

Situation In the past it was expected and sanctioned in my role to report yield data that did not include the scrap product that we reground for reuse. The new measurement system requires me to count and report all scrapped product.

Dilemma If I don’t cooperate, I’ll get in trouble; if I do, someone’s going to ask why our department is experiencing a sudden decrease in yield.

Situation As an operator, I take pride and am rewarded for minimizing downtime and maximizing production AND I am being asked to experiment with new molds and stop the process to collect data. This means I have an additional new role as an experimenter, scientist and learner for which I’m not rewarded.

Dilemma If I cooperate, I’ll lose production and possible rewards; if I don’t, I anger the quality team. My solution is to say I’ll do it and then not follow through.

Situation A reorganization has resulted in a work group comprised of two operators and two group leaders, each pair working as partners in different geographical locations. The operator in question is resentful about having been passed over for promotion to group leader and is working un-cooperatively.

Dilemma As a group leader on a “self-managed” team, I am in a bind when my co-worker slows down his work. I have the choice of either picking up the slack for him or not; if I don’t, production suffers. When I ask for more cooperation, he says it’s my responsibility, since I make the “big bucks”.

Situation A supervisor manages both a self managed team and a traditional work group in the same area.

Dilemma He is criticized by employees from both groups for behaving inconsistently.

Situation A supervisor has a number of people who were “bumped” into his/her group two years ago from other departments. These people are now judged to have more seniority than the members of the supervisor’s original group. The original group

members are now losing their shift preferences. No clear personnel policy seems to exist for these complicated transition matters.

Dilemma The supervisor has three groups with different seniority from different parts of the organization. Someone is going to be affected and potentially hurt regardless of how he/she manages the problem. Productivity and morale is suffering greatly and the employees are beginning to have a tremendous amount of animosity towards management and change.

Situation I work for two related departments. In one, my role is changing, expanding to include project work, reflecting the company's shift to empowering workers, in the other, I'm still operating as a clerk.

Dilemma I feel demeaned in my role as a clerk in the one department. As my role in the other department becomes more substantial and fulfilling, I am increasingly disappointed and frustrated by my other responsibilities.

Situation A lack of agreement exists among middle management on interpreting and enforcing new rules and regulations, e.g., no smoking in the building and scheduled breaks.

Dilemma As a supervisor, if I enforce an unpopular rule, I alienate my people (particularly when it is not being enforced by my peers in adjacent areas). If I don't enforce the rules, my performance may suffer and I participate in breaking company rules.

Situation As a female supervisor, I am required to give a performance review to a worker who has asked me out for dates (which I have refused) and has physically intimidated me when angered by my refusal and a previous performance review. I have asked my (male) manager to be present with me during subsequent reviews; my manager discounts the danger and tells me to be less confrontational with this employee (essentially undermining me and protecting him).

Dilemma I am afraid to be alone with this worker; I fear that he may become angry. My manager(s) won't support me nor understand or believe the danger I sense. I am forced to either not give an honest assessment of the employee's work, endanger myself and/or be perceived by my manager(s) as a weak, incompetent female. In addition, I believe that I have jeopardized my performance review.

Situation My manager has sent me for intensive training to develop technical skills for assessing production efficiency yet won't allow me to implement my newly learned skills.

Dilemma If I use my training, I show how the current process is inefficient, which would require us to stop production and rethink certain processes. My manager and team chastise me for such analyses ("I feel like a shot messenger"). They worry that they will not meet their production quota if we use these new analysis techniques or that a "truth" about our production may be revealed and go against our performance evaluation.

When people find themselves in binds and dilemmas like these, it is natural (and in some cases appropriately self-protective) for them to resist. In most of the previous examples, an employee is resisting. She/he might understand the change, the technical process and what they are being

told or asked to do. Binds in the employee's situation prevent them from completing the task and confuses and, most likely, stresses them -- they do not know how to proceed or to whom to turn in their suffering. Their supervisor/manager considers the individual as a resistor, disobeying his/her authority when, in reality, the system has left the employee and the manager in binds that, if unresolved, could potentially explode. In using this workshop as an intervention in a system over time, clear patterns in the dilemmas emerge yielding a diagnostic database of cause and effect.

A Process for Managing Resistance to Change

Resistance occurs *at the boundary*. We have learned that when an organization institutes any change, no matter how small or large, role, task and authority boundaries change. People may deny that a boundary exists or may be reluctant to engage or cross it. They may lack an understanding about it or be put into mis-cast or ill-defined roles. Tasks within these roles and authority relationships may be unclear. To minimize resistance, a group needs to understand and manage their dynamics and establish clear **boundaries** by:

- Defining purpose, goals and objectives and being explicit about the group or individual **task**;
- Developing clear and understandable **roles** for all group members;
- Understanding and talking about the **authority** structure(s);
- Discussing as many of the **real** dilemmas, issues, situations, constraints, and so on, within the group; and
- Measuring and evaluating individual and group performance and progress towards their collective goals.

Resistance in groups is natural. The most difficult task of any group is to simultaneously explore its dynamic process (including resistance), do its work and explain itself to its parts and stakeholders -- communicating across its boundaries.

In this article, we have presented our work with resistance and some of our key learning regarding resistance, how it operates and how to work with it. The following summarizes the steps we consider important in *managing* resistance -- our own and other's:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| Resistance | 1. Identify <u>both</u> your and the others' resistance. One way would be to examine a portion of a conversation that you were having with another in which you experienced resistant behavior; where you were reluctant to say what you were actually thinking. |
| Bind | 2. Imagine yourself actually saying what you were thinking. What would you say? As you say this, what are you feeling? How does your actual response serve to protect you from these uncomfortable feelings and from loss or the fear of loss? Can you see the bind? |
| Dilemma | 3. Clarify the others' possible dilemma(s) or loss(es). Explore for yourself the other person's dilemma; get in touch with your empathy for them. What does she/he stand to lose? What might she/he feel? |
| | 4. Clarify your dilemma(s) or loss(es). Tell the other person about your dilemma and what you stand to lose? How would you say what you were actually thinking in a non-judgmental, non-blaming way? |
| Feelings | 5. Imagine yourself actually saying these words. What are you feeling? Compare how you felt saying it this way to your first feelings (Step 3). |

Role, Task and Authority Boundaries

6. Explore reasons why you and/or the system may be immobilized in light of role, task and authority boundaries. As you examine your and the other person's dilemma(s), add more examples of resistance, what might be lost and how people feel. Explore the system, looking for unclear or misaligned role, task and authority boundaries. Find the common thread/pattern in the *data* to begin seeing the systemic or organizational dilemma(s).
7. Develop recommended changes to the system to relieve the stress. Continue to pay attention to your own resistance. Begin this process again to explore the potential resistance to the recommendation (a change).
8. Determine what you are responsible for changing? What might be in your control? What actions can you take to calm the resistance? Develop an action plan for exploring recommended changes in the system.

Yvonne Agazarian aptly summarizes the work of *managing resistance to change* in her "Theory of Living Human Systems":

"There is no right or wrong until its explored and then there are only different ways of seeing, thinking or doing!

You can only effect change and consult to the resistance if you can "see" (identify), work with and communicate across the many boundaries that exist. Living human systems transform through learning to recognize differences and integrating them -- both differences in the apparently similar and the similarities in the apparently different." ⁹

Remember, resistance occurs at all boundaries and there is a choice at every boundary. When there are choices, resistance will get talked about and diminish.

We believe that leaders of change must better understand the nature of resistance and how their actions and the changes they are implementing effect the people and organizations they are trying to change. We offer a way of thinking about resistance that moderates its negative connotations into productive data that can be used to make "informed" decisions. This is a process that helps people discuss their resistance and legitimize their feelings in order to foster learning and manage transitions.

As Martin Buber once wrote, "The origin of all conflict between me and my fellow man is that I do not say what I mean, and that I do not do what I say. For this confuses and poisons, again and again and in increasing measure, the situation between myself and the other man, and I, in my internal disintegration, am no longer able to master it, but contrary to all my illusions, have

⁹ Agazarian, Y., [A Theory of Living Human Systems](#).

become its slave.”¹⁰ If we do not learn to understand and work with resistance, we will surely become its slave.

***Note:** We use a number of techniques and theories that are too complex to include in this forum but are critical to our approach. The workshop and organizational intervention is formed from psychoanalytic, group relations and systems theory and technology and Chris Argyris’ work in action science/learning. The workshop has been utilized in a number of organizations with substantial results and continued success.*

¹⁰ Buber, M., *The Way of Man, According to the Teaching of Hasidism.*