

Points of View that Engender

Resistance to Change*

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Points of View that Engender Resistance to Change
Abstract

Resistance to change has generally been understood as a result of personal experiences and assessments about the reliability of others. This paper deviates from that understanding by proposing that there are three points of view which predispose people toward certain resistive behaviors and communications: complacency, resignation, and cynicism.

Resistance to Change

Why is there resistance to organizational change? Some theorists propose that people resist change because it threatens the status quo (Beer, 1980; Hannan & Freeman, 1988; Hermon-Taylor, 1985; Spector, 1989), thereby increasing their fear and anxiety of real or imagined consequences (Morris & Raben, 1995; Smith & Berg, 1987) including threats to their personal security (Bryant, 1989) and confidence in their ability to perform (Morris & Raben, 1995; O'Toole, 1995). People may also resist change because it threatens their way of making sense of the world, calling into question their values and rationality (Ledford, et al., 1989) and prompting some form of self justification (Staw, 1981) or defensive reasoning (Argyris, 1990). Other theorists suggest that people resist change because they distrust or have past resentments toward those who lead change (Block, 1993; Bridges, 1980; Bryant, 1989; Ends & Page, 1977; O'Toole, 1995), have different understandings or assessments of the situation (Morris & Raben, 1995), or their established social relations are threatened (Lawrence, 1954). Still others may resist change in an attempt to preserve their autonomy or self-control (Morris & Raben, 1995).

Each of these perspectives makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of and our ability to deal with resistance by focusing our attention on the types of conditions and circumstances that contribute to resistance. When taken as a whole, this literature proposes that resistance is largely a function of personal subjective experiences, feelings, and reactions, e.g., fear, uncertainty, and resentment, and of subjective assessments about the characteristics of relationships between people, e.g., a lack of trust, misunderstandings, and control issues. Resistance to change, then, is attributed to these subjective experiences and relational assessments.

But recent research on cynicism and organizational change indicates that people have a particular orientation toward change that shapes their feelings about themselves or their relationships with others and that contributes to their resistance to change (Block, 1993; Dean & Brandes-Duncan, 1995; Kanter & Mirvis, 1989; Vance, et al., 1995; Wanous, et al., 1995). In a sense, people can be said to have an a priori point of view about change, a predisposition or mindset (Reger, et al., 1994) which is prior to their experiences and through which their experiences are filtered, resulting in assessments that influence how they will relate to change. Just as there are points of view for producing change (Ford & Ford, 1994), there may also be points of view that engender resistance to change (Reger, et al., 1994). If this is the case, then attempts to resolve resistance that are designed to provide different personal experiences may prove to be largely ineffective when they do not address the deeper, underlying points of view through which those experiences will be experienced. No matter what experiential or relational factors are operative in the situation, resistance will continue until the underlying points of view are addressed (Block, 1993).

This paper extends our current understanding of resistance to change by proposing that people have point of views regarding change that determine how they will relate to and interact with change, and whether and in what way they will resist change. More specifically, it proposes three points of view which predispose people to displaying resistive behaviors: complacency, resignation, and cynicism. Rather than being attitudes or thoughts, these points of view are more accurately understood as a "way of being" (Winograd & Flores, 1987) in the face of change. As such, people with different (same)

personality traits may have similar (different) points of view (Guastello, et al., 1992). We are proposing that people will respond to change differently depending on whether their point of view is one of complacency, resignation, or cynicism.

Trialectics: Attraction to a Future

What we call resistance is actually a phenomenon of behaviors and communications. Whether they are overt or covert, saying that these behaviors and communications demonstrate “resistance” is tantamount to saying that they are caused by an opposition of forces, e.g., the opposition of an individual or a group to a change proposal or process. This dialectical approach (Ford & Ford, 1994) establishes resistance to change as a conflict, contradiction, or opposition between a resistor and a change or its agent, which conflict must be resolved or overcome (Smith & Berg, 1987) through the use of one or more resistance-reducing strategies (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979).

An alternative to the oppositional perspective to resistance can be found in the trialectics approach (Ford & Ford, 1994). This approach presumes that the source of the behaviors and communications that are understood as resistance is actually based in attraction rather than in conflict. Rather than positing opposition to a change, trialectics presumes that change is a function of an active-attractive relationship in which people are drawn or attracted toward some future state or condition. Depending on what is active for them (i.e., what they are looking for, listening for, open to, etc.), people will behave in ways that reflect this active-attractive relation between their current state and an envisioned future state. According to trialectical logic, people who behave in ways that appear to be supportive of the proposed change are attracted to a future which they have associated with that change. Those who behave in ways that appear to be resisting the proposal are simply attracted to a different future (Ford & Ford, 1994). In this interpretation, people who appear to be resisting a change are simply not attracted to the future that it portends and they are acting in ways that are consistent with some other future which is attractive.

The trialectic approach means that people are always engaged in future-supportive behavior, and that they will relate to a proposed change in terms of the future to which they are already attracted, and not in the terms that are actually being proposed. For example, people who are interested in increasing efficiency might see rightsizing as an opportunity to cut costs and reduce waste. They might then be predisposed to support a rightsizing initiative because it suggests a future to which they are already attracted. Other people who are committed to improving customer service and satisfaction might see the same rightsizing initiative as unlikely to support their attractive future, and so would behave in ways that would support a customer focus, and would not support the proposed change (Reger, et al., 1994). Two different futures, one efficiency-related the other service-related, are both attractive at the same time for different people. People attracted to different futures (positive as well as negative) will have a different relationship to the same proposal for change, creating the illusion of resistance to the change itself.

The apparently resistive behaviors observed in the process of introducing and implementing an organizational change are only an indirect response to what is actually happening (Berry, 1994; Block, 1981), and may have more to do with the futures to which people are attracted, and which they associate with a change proposal, than with the change per se. Resistance, then, is not related directly to a change itself, but to the future that the change implies or that people expect the change to produce. This has significant implications for what we are proposing here, since complacency, resignation, and cynicism all have to do with people's relation to and expectations about the future (Wanous, et al., 1995).

Resistance-Generating Points of View

What makes points of view interesting is that they give us a future (what is attractive) as well as a way of relating to and interpreting the present that is consistent with that future (what is active). This means that changes will be related to from one's point of view, and with respect to the future that is attractive in that point of view. We propose that there are three points of view that are at the source of behaviors and communications that appear resistive to organization change: complacency, resignation, and cynicism. In this section, we will examine the characteristics of each, beginning with complacency. The basis for our discussion is found in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 Here]

Complacency

Disposition. Typified by such statements as "If its not broken, don't fix it.", "Why mess with success?", and "Don't rock the boat.", complacency is the point of view that change is unnecessary (Reger, et al., 1994). The complacent person is relatively comfortable with the way things are. There is a certain self-satisfaction and contentment with the way things are, sometimes to the point of appearing smug, arrogant, or overly self-confident. People with a complacent point of view are satisfied with and accepting of the way things are, content with themselves and their conditions. Even if they do see that things could be improved upon, there is no motivation to make the change because there is nothing much wrong with the way things are now.

Development. Complacency comes from past success: people settle back on their success(es), believing that they cannot fail because the success(es) will continue or can be easily repeated (Johnson, 1988). Since historical success is seen as evidence of the efficacy of what they have done and are doing (Hedberg, et al., 1976), people avoid making changes (Gutman, 1988), thereby contributing to the "success breeds failure" syndrome (Whetten, 1980) in which they continue to practice once successful strategies on the assumption that the past success is the only type of success that is needed, and that the actions of the past are all that is needed to continue producing it. Even strong signals that things are deteriorating may be ignored or discounted, which can allow small deteriorations to accumulate into nonadaptation, and decline (Ford & Baucus, 1987; Hedberg, et al., 1976). Eventually people can forget how to do the things that once led

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to success, and ultimately devolve into going through the motions without the passion, intentionality, or commitment that initially led to success (Nichols, 1993).

Orientation to Self and Others. People with a complacent point of view are primarily concerned with the successes in their own past, present, and future; where others have succeeded or what they propose to do is of little or no interest. Success is seen as a result of what I or we have, have done in the past, or are doing now (Gutman, 1988). Complacency is very much a “me-us” orientation in which people attribute success to themselves, and to their personal or group attributes, capabilities, and actions (Bettman & Weitz, 1983; Kelley, 1973). People with a complacent point of view are quite clear that they are capable of succeeding, which means that their apparent resistance to change is not a function of inability, but of a belief that nothing new or different is needed.

Relation to Future. One of the most difficult things confronting managers of successful organizations is convincing people that they must change (Hedberg, et al., 1976; Johnson, 1988; Nichols, 1993). Complacent people have a positive orientation toward the future and the prospect of continued success, which makes it difficult to arouse them to change. The presumption of a successful future means that there is no attraction associated toward the new future that a change will bring. Any attempt to inspire or produce a change will be regarded as unnecessary at best and as upsetting a good thing at worst. Change portends a different, possibly less successful, comfortable, or acceptable future than the future to which they are already attracted, i.e., the future given by the continuation of a successful past. To rouse complacent people, some managers have found it necessary to create imaginary competitors that will stimulate a drive to change (Johnson, 1988) or to otherwise increase dissatisfaction (Spector, 1989).

Resignation

Disposition. Resignation is typified by such statements as “Why should I, it won’t make any difference anyway.”, “What’s the point?”, and “I’ll never.....” and is the point of view that things are not the way they should be, we want them to be, or believe they could be, but we have no hope of ever being able to change them (Reger, et al., 1994). People who are resigned have given up in the face of the way “things are” and their own failures to be effective (Kouzes & Posner, 1993). Resigned people go through the motions in their work or play, but these are half-hearted actions with no life or power that wear down the inspiration and energy of those around them (Conner, 1995).

Development. Resignation arises when people become reconciled to their apparent inability to make something happen, even though they wish that they could make things better (Martin, 1991). Where complacency develops in response to success, resignation develops in response to failure and unfulfilled expectations. When people expect something, they look for it as being likely to occur, something that it is supposed to happen. When what they expect does not happen, or what they do not expect actually occurs, their expectations are unfulfilled and they are disappointed or frustrated. “What is” comes into clash with “what should(n’t) be” and the result is experienced as a failure. The failure experience, from a resignation point of view, is ultimately interpreted to mean

that *we* are failures: our success is really hopeless, our desires will never be satisfied, and our commitments will never be fulfilled. We expect to fail even as we wish for success.

Orientation to Self and Others. Normally when people encounter failure, they make self-serving attributions and blame the failure on factors outside of themselves (Bettman & Weitz, 1983; Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1982; Kelley, 1973; Salancik & Meindl, 1984). However, in the case of resignation, one blames some aspect of oneself as the source failure. These "I/we" attributions argue for the inability or limitations of an individual/group: "I don't have the skills, background, or luck", "my position doesn't give me any power", and "I can't get my colleagues to understand", "we never get the support we need", "our group never gets included in the big decisions", and "our company is not competitive enough". These attributions are found where failures are distinctive (limited to specific areas), consistent (occur repeatedly), and uncommon (there are others who are successful) (Kelley, 1973; McArthur, 1972; Weiner, 1979). From the resigned point of view, there is a belief that others could deal effectively with the perceived conditions or circumstances, whether or not those others would agree. Thus resignation fosters those behaviors and communications that justify not doing anything to improve the circumstances of the group, organization, or community.

Relation to Future. Resignation is a *conclusion* about the nature of my/our future and my/our ability to shape it. People who are resigned have come to accept the inevitability of a hopeless future and the futility in being able to change it (Steer, 1993). The future *is* a continuation of the past in which I/we have been and will continue to be powerless. As a result, resigned people are not attracted to making any changes because they are sure they cannot do it, even though others may have demonstrated that success is possible. Just as complacent people are sure that their successful past will continue into a successful future, resigned people are sure that their past failure(s) have doomed them to future failure.

Cynicism

Disposition. Cynicism is typified by such statements as "Who are they kidding, no one can make this work.", "I don't know why they bother, this won't work either.", and "This is just more of the same old stuff." and is the point of view that things are going wrong, coupled with the conviction that *no one* can ever reverse things due to certain immutable external circumstances or operating principles (Vance, et al., 1995). Where resignation is primarily a self-centered point of view, cynicism is a point of view with a great deal to say about others. There is an insistence that no success is possible, and that anyone who thinks that they can succeed is either unwilling to recognize the truth or inauthentic about recognizing their own inability (Dean & Brandes-Duncan, 1995; Vance, et al., 1995; Wanous, et al., 1995). The cynic doubts his own ability and is in an argument with others about the limits of their ability as well (Goldfarb, 1991) to the point that they have distrust and disbelief in others (Block, 1993; Goldfarb, 1991; Kanter & Mirvis, 1989) as well as resentment, scorn, derision, and contempt (Greenfield, 1994; Kopvillem, 1996; Kouzes & Posner, 1993; Stivers, 1994).

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What makes cynicism different from resignation is that cynicism is a more hostile, aggressive attack on the possibility that change could be successful, and on the integrity and credibility of those who propose or are associated with a change (Stivers, 1994). In a cynical point of view, “one must show contempt for the stupidity and absurdity” of others (Stivers, 1994) who just don’t seem to recognize or are unwilling to tell the truth about the way things really are.

Development. Like resignation, cynicism develops in response to a history of failure (Wanous, et al., 1995) in which one’s expectations are frustrated and disappointed (Dean & Brandes-Duncan, 1995; Vance, et al., 1995). In addition, however, cynical people are disillusioned and feel that they have been let down, deceived, betrayed, or misled by powerful others (Kanter & Mirvis, 1989; Kouzes & Posner, 1993). This sense of deception and betrayal comes in part from an expectation that others know or should have known what would happen, and didn’t tell the truth, thereby setting up or contributing to a failure (Block, 1993; Goldfarb, 1991; Kanter & Mirvis, 1989; Kouzes & Posner, 1993; Wanous, et al., 1995). The cynic’s sense of deception also comes from the belief that since no one can change things, anyone who argues for change must be engaged in some form of con or deception, and should not be trusted. The history of failure provides evidence for others’ inauthenticity in admitting what the cynic already knows - nothing can change things. Thus, cynicism is a function of personal failure, the failure of others, and a denial of the possibility of success.

Orientation to Self and Others. Whereas both complacency and resignation involve self-directed attributions (“I’m already doing the right things”, or “I can’t make any difference”), cynicism includes attributions to others in which others are portrayed as equally unable to make any difference. For example, cynical employees may be convinced that a change will never work because those responsible for the change are incompetent, lazy, or both (Wanous, et al., 1995). Since the cynic “knows” that no one and nothing can make a difference he will argue and defend his point of view, perhaps even claiming that proponents of the change are dishonest, selfish, and untrustworthy, with questionable and inauthentic motives (Dean & Brandes-Duncan, 1995; Goldner, et al., 1977; Kanter & Mirvis, 1989; Wanous, et al., 1995).

The cynic’s orientation to self and others tends to absolve the cynic of responsibility for having given up. The self-confidence of knowing that the world really is a particular way allows the cynic to maintain the illusion of not having quit. Further, cynics can claim that their values are still intact even in the face of the certain failures given by reality. As a result, they may project a sense of being above it all, with a certain righteousness about their point of view.

Relation to Future. Cynicism is a pessimistic view of the future (Dean & Brandes-Duncan, 1995; Wanous, et al., 1995) in which failure and inauthenticity are expected and nothing can be done to right the wrongs. Unlike the resigned point of view, in which failure is blamed on one’s own shortcomings, someone with a cynical point of view will blame failures on shortcomings in others, in the larger system, or in the world. From the cynical point of view, nothing will change until “it” changes and you can’t trust the human and systemic elements of “it” to do what they should do. Cynics, therefore,

expect the future to be continually dissatisfying, frustrating, and unfulfilling, and they are satisfied that they are right about that. The importance of being right about the future can sometimes lead the cynic to work against the very changes that could alter things, leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Vance, et al., 1995; Wanous, et al., 1995). Cynics see certain external factors as immutable, may be resentful and angry, and may even work to enroll others in the futility of taking action. When the change fails, the failure serves as a validation of the cynical point of view (Vance, et al., 1995; Wanous, et al., 1995). In this way, the cynical point of view avoids culpability while maintaining the appearance of being committed to making things better.

Discussion and Implications

We are proposing that points of view provide a different understanding for and perspective on those behaviors and communications which appear to be resisting organizational change, and further, that the kinds of resistive behaviors will differ depending on the point of view that is being maintained. In fact, it may well be that the subjective experiences and assessments which are seen as sources of resistance are themselves expressions of the three underlying points of view identified here. This possibility is illustrated in Table 2 where different personal experiences and assessments that have been described as sources of resistance are related to one of the predisposing points of view.

When employees say “The risk of changing is unwarranted because we could lose everything good that we have”, their fear of change is evident, but the underlying complacency (satisfaction with the way things are) is less obvious. Another statement, “I know what they are saying, but I don’t believe them” reveals a personal lack of trust in a relationship, and suggests a possible predisposition to cynicism regarding change. The possibility that points of view underlie personal experiences and assessments suggests the need for research that examines these points of view. If, as we propose, points of view are the deeper structures (Gersick, 1991), then we should focus our strategies for dealing with resistance on the points of view themselves, and not the experiential symptoms of those points of view.

[Insert Table 2 Here]

The three points of view presented here portray resistance as a response to past successes or failures which are projected into the future, rather than as a response to immediate conditions and circumstances. Each point of view provides a coherent and complete structure that integrates the past and the future seamlessly: the individual is attracted to a future that is given by the past. This means that resistance to change is never about what is happening now, but is always about what has already happened in the past, and is colored by the meaning that the past assigns to possibilities for the future.

While the dialectical, or conflict-based approach to organizational change presumes that certain behaviors represent a resistance to change, a trialectical viewpoint presumes that a change proposal will confront everyone involved with a variety of possible futures. Different futures will attract different people. People with a

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complacent point of view will be attracted to a future in which the status quo reigns, because that future will be most successful based on past experience. People with a resigned point of view will be attracted to a future in which they are exempted from the change, because that future will allow them to avoid the certain failure they believe is their lot. People with a cynical point of view will be attracted to a future in which their betrayers either fail or are revealed as untrustworthy or uncaring con artists, because that future will allow them to be right about the impossibility of making a difference.

The Issue of Responsibility

Each of the three points of view presented here has its genesis in expectations from the past, as well as historical evidence about whether those expectations are likely to be fulfilled (complacency) or not (resignation and cynicism) in the future. But who is responsible for these expectations? In a changing organization, it is convenient for workers to blame managers, as exemplified by such statements as “Management is trying to change things unnecessarily” (complacency), “Management wants us to do this but we’ll never get the resources we need to make it work” (resignation), and “Management says they want to improve productivity, but they are really trying to downsize and put some of us out of work” (cynicism). Some employee expectations do result from the things that leaders and managers say they will or will not do (Kouzes & Posner, 1993). When managers deliver what they promise, credibility is enhanced. To the extent that managers make promises which they do not keep, and which they do not acknowledge that they did not, are not, or will not keep, they undermine their own credibility and contribute directly to the unfulfilled expectations of resignation and cynicism (Ends & Page, 1977; Kouzes & Posner, 1993). In an organization where promises are consistently not kept, resignation and cynicism can become the accepted point of view (Thompson, 1994).

But not all expectations are the result of promises made by managers or executives. Indeed, employees have their own visions, dreams, values, beliefs, and commitments which generate their own personal expectations about what can and cannot be done, how, and by whom. This means that employees have expectations which occur independent of whatever managers say or do. Even so, there is a popular assumption that it is a management responsibility to fulfill employee expectations (Kanter & Mirvis, 1989; Wanous, et al., 1995), no matter how extravagant or unrealistic (Boorstin, 1961). Further, since the complacent, resigned, and cynical points of view are an outcome of either the fulfillment or the nonfulfillment of these expectations, it may be convenient for employees to blame managers for whatever points of view are operative in their organization, even though the managers had no direct part in the generation of those expectations.

Whether or not people want to “own” their expectations, or their responses to their fulfillment or non-fulfillment, it is possible for them to choose to do so. We can be responsible for our expectations, including the expectation that promises be kept (or not, in the case of the cynic). We can also be responsible for our own responses when those expectations are fulfilled or not (Block, 1993). Any individual’s response to an unfulfilled expectation, regardless of where that expectation comes from, is ultimately

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one's own. With respect to this ubiquitous option for personal responsibility, taking the option of blaming management as the source of one's own point of view is a self-serving attribution. It denies individual responsibility not only for the choices made about whatever meanings are assigned to past successes and failures, but also for having committed oneself to a future that is a linear product of the past, and for avoiding the consideration of new futures and new possibilities which are not derived from one's own history. In short, blaming others makes people victims (Belasco & Stayer, 1993; Block, 1993).

Exercising the option to take personal responsibility for one's expectations, and for one's response to the degree of fulfillment of those expectations does not suggest, however, that management plays no role in the development and continuation of complacent, resigned, and cynical points of view. Managers regularly act in ways that may "feed" the different points of view. One way is through impression management (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Managers, like other people, have an interest in how they are perceived and evaluated by others, and the way they go about initiating and managing an organizational change will be influenced by their attempts to manage the impressions they make on others (Ford & Ford, 1994). For example, managers may engage in distortion, partial disclosure (Eisenberg, 1984), even lying in order to look good, maintain their public personae, and obtain buy-in. If the desired change is unsuccessful, managers may give excuses, justifications, and other accounts that place themselves in a favorable light, even if it reflects poorly on their colleagues or subordinates. Managers who are confronting crises may also make it appear that things are really under control in order to foster an impression of competence (Hedberg, et al., 1976; Staw, 1981). Such managers lose credibility by being unwilling to come clean and admit their mistakes (Kouzes & Posner, 1993) and in so doing they provide justification for people in their work place who have complacent, resigned, or cynical points of view.

The option for responsibility regarding expectations and their resultant points of view suggests an opportunity for research on the relationship between techniques of impression management during organization change and the occurrence of complacency, resignation, and cynicism toward change. We would expect that where managers are engaged extensively in "looking good", there will be a higher incidence of complacency, resignation, and cynicism than where managers' reputations are based on straightforward, authentic communication.

Complacency, resignation, and cynicism can also be fed by what managers pay attention to and communicate during the change process. For example, managers who say they want one thing and then reward something else (Kerr, 1975) are likely to find higher levels of resignation and cynicism than managers who are consistent (Kouzes & Posner, 1993) with their stated objectives and the performance they reward. Similarly, managers who primarily focus on and talk about problems, what does not work, and who is to blame are likely to contribute to the sense of powerless, futility, and betrayal found in resignation and cynicism (Oakley & Krug, 1991). And managers who fail to communicate the outcomes of change efforts, whether those efforts have failed, succeeded, or partially succeeded, run the risk of feeding the resigned and cynical points

of view (Wanous, et al., 1995). When people cannot make clear connections between their work and the rewards and results from that work, they will be more likely to rely on their past experience to tell them what is really going on in their work environment.

The ways that managers relate to and interact with employee expectations can also contribute to complacent, resigned and cynical points of view toward change. Realistic job previews (Wanous, 1992) have been developed to avoid the situation in which newcomers discover that the organization they joined was not what they were led to believe, i.e., their expectations are not met. People given realistic job previews (RJPs) report higher job satisfaction and have lower turnover than those who do not. The success of RJP's suggests that a similar methodology, e.g., a realistic change preview (RCP), may be one way of getting people's expectations about a change out in the open. RCP's, if conducted as a dialogue (Isaacs, 1993; Schein, 1993; Senge, 1990) might allow people an opportunity to examine the assumptions and expectations underlying their thoughts and feelings, thereby giving them a chance to correct any unrealistic, inappropriate, or unfounded expectations. The failure to openly communicate and discuss expectations increases the likelihood that those expectations will go unfulfilled, leaving everyone open to charges of being dishonest, unfair, or manipulative (Ends & Page, 1977).

Leaders and managers have a responsibility to create work environments that are productive and empowering (Block, 1987; Block, 1993; Kouzes & Posner, 1993). But when leaders are themselves complacent, resigned, or cynical about their organization and the people they are leading, they may contribute to a vicious cycle in which managerial complacency, resignation, and cynicism generates and is generated by employee complacency, resignation, and cynicism. Wanous et al. (1995), for example, found that managers had a cynical response when told of employee cynicism. The difficulty is that managers may not see that their own points of view contribute to the very points of view they find objectionable (Belasco & Stayer, 1993; Stayer, 1990). Even worse, some managers may have an interest in having different points of view persist because it provides a justification for their own actions. This line of reasoning suggests the need for research that examines leaders' points of view, the ways in which these are manifested in their leadership style, and in what ways they are related to the points of view held of those they manage. We suspect that it will be difficult, if not impossible, for leaders to engage in credibility enhancing practices (Kouzes&Posner, 1993) if they are complacent, resigned, or cynical about those they lead.

The Role of Conversations

Points of view do not arise as solitary mental phenomena. They are human constructions that occur in a context of human social interactions, which constitute and are constituted by communication (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Giddens, 1984; Pfeffer & Salanick, 1978). People behave and communicate in obvious and observable ways: they talk about their expectations and experiences, complain about what has and has not happened, and tell stories about situations and people, all of which contribute to other people's understandings about how things work in the organization and why they work that way. These conversations produce and reproduce what people come to understand as

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reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), independent of people's direct experience of the events, situations, or people referenced in the conversation. It is these conversations, added to our direct experiences, which inform and are informed by our points of view. Our points of view arise in a recursive process of social construction in which points of view are created, sustained, and modified in conversations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Ford & Backoff, 1988). Indeed, our points of view are expressed in our conversations.

Complacent, resigned, and cynical points of view are, therefore, a function of what people talk about and the ways that they talk about it, as shown in Table 2. It may be possible to simply listen to the kinds of conversations that occur in an organization over some period of time in order to determine the predominant point of view. A preponderance of complacent conversations would suggest that the type of resistive behaviors to be found in the organization are likely to be procrastination, avoidance, and withdrawal. A majority of resigned conversations might indicate a high likelihood that change would be greeted with reduced morale, non participation, and other forms of covert withholding. A high proportion of cynical conversations would indicate the likelihood of sabotage, hidden agendas, and politicking in response to a proposal for change. As more people talk in the same ways about the same kinds of things over time, they create more reality to what is being talked about, i.e., it becomes objectified (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

When looked at from a conversational perspective, it makes a difference what people say and to whom they say it. Conversations aren't simply reports on reality, they are the process of socially constructing, or generating, the reality of the organization (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Berquist, 1993; Ford & Ford, 1995; Rorty, 1989; Winograd & Flores, 1987). Much of what we know about our world comes not from our direct experience, but from conversations passed on by others. This means that any conversation in which complaining, gossip, undermining and other forms of reactive speaking (Oakley & Krug, 1991) will contribute to complacent, resigned, and cynical points of view. It also means that anyone who engages in these types of conversations contributes to the strengthening of these points of view in the organization. In this way, conversations in organizations can form cultures of complacency, resignation, and cynicism. This suggests the need for research on the relationship between what people talk about (e.g., management, labor, the competition), the form (e.g., complaint, acknowledgment, report), and different points of view (complacency, resignation, and cynicism).

If points of view are generated and sustained through conversations and their concomitant social information processing (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Ford & Ford, 1988), then the task of changing points of view entails changing what is said. This means both that people can recognize that they do not need to continue saying what they have been saying, and that they could start saying something different (Rorty, 1989). It is possible that it matters more that something new is said than whether the new conversation is true, real, or accurate. The power of saying something new is demonstrated in the case of a CEO who was able to break through the complacency in his organization by generating and sustaining conversations about competing with phantom competitors (Johnson, 1988). Others have similarly argued that shifting the focus of conversations can produce

breakthroughs in organizational performance and change (Oakley & Krug, 1991; Scherr, 1989).

According to Ford and Ford (1995), change is produced in and through four types of conversations: initiative, understanding, performance, and closure. Initiative conversations initiate change, thereby contributing to expectations that something is going to happen (or not, in the case of the cynic). When initiative conversations stall, the unfulfilled expectations will be dealt with in a variety of conversations for understanding what happened and why or why not. The unfulfilled expectations can leave people upset or unfinished about the initiative, and they will talk about what happened from their own points of view. These conversations are a way to “fill in” the vacuum of an incomplete initiative. To avoid this “filling in” problem, Ford and Ford (1995) propose that managers actively conduct, support, and manage new conversations for closure. Where there are conversations for closure, there is likely to be less complacency, resignation, and cynicism.

Closure and Completing the Past

Bridges (1980) proposes that where prior changes have not been closed or completed, people are left dissatisfied with the lack of closure. All subsequent attempts to introduce change will occur within this “conversational space” of incompleteness and dissatisfaction. In a sense, the past has defined the future, and people are not really free to invent a new future until closure has been brought to the past (Albert, 1983; Albert, 1984). Even when people “fill in” an incomplete initiative with conversations about their own understandings and attributions, derived from their own points of view, this talk does not complete the episode. It simply provides a story or explanation which will in turn contribute to the prevailing complacent, resigned, or cynical point of view.

We suggest that incompleteness and a lack of closure from the past underlies each of the three points of view. Failed or fulfilled expectations from the past have been interpreted in particular ways and given certain meanings, which have then hardened into one of three general points of view with respect to change. These points of view then engender certain behaviors and communications as a response to the incomplete past. These same points of view also are associated with specific beliefs about the futures that will result from a change process. Points of view are a reaction to the past; in fact, they are the past made present. The past is prologue.

This perspective diverges from that of those who propose that points of view are an anticipation of future events (Wanous, et al., 1995). When the future is determined solely by the past, as it is when one is locked into a point of view about organizational change, there *are* no future events other than that which is given by the past-determined point of view. The future will be a demonstration of the accuracy of one’s judgments about the past, i.e., it will validate one’s point of view. The past gives the future to which people are attracted (Ford & Ford, 1994).

One of the implications of this perspective is that people can be supported in completing the incomplete past, with all its attendant expectations and interpretations of

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failure and fulfillment, and thus be freed to invent new futures to which they are attracted which are not based in complacency, resignation, or cynicism. Conversations for closure (Ford & Ford, 1995) are essential for creating “a sense of harmonious completion” wherein tension with past events is reduced or removed and balance and equilibrium are restored (Albert, 1983; Bridges, 1980). As Jick (1993, 197) states “disengaging from the past is critical to awakening to a new reality”. Closure allows the past to remain in the past, which makes possible a new recognition of what is actually present, and thus a new opportunity to create a future independent of yesterday’s points of view (Goss, et al., 1993).

Conversations for closure are constituted by a dialogue in which people examine the assumptions and expectations which underlie their actions and afford people the opportunity to reflect on their responsibility for what has happened (Block, 1993; Isaacs, 1993; Senge, 1990). Through dialogue, people can express what is incomplete about the past and explore ways to resolve differences and misunderstandings. It is in these conversations that people can express their commitments and be acknowledged for what they have done and not done in the organization. This acknowledgment brings recognition and celebration to the contributions, actions, and outcomes of past changes (Ford & Ford, 1995). It also recognizes the expectations that people have had, and those that have and have not been fulfilled. Celebration is more than rewards: it connotes ceremony, acclaim, and festivity that honors individuals, groups, events, and achievements (DeForest, 1986; Morris & Raben, 1995). Things to celebrate are the stages of change, successes, losses and failures, people, and events (DeForest, 1986). At each of these points, there is an opportunity to close out a change process and clear the record to allow new futures to become present.

Conversations for closure also provide the opportunity for people to reassess their responsibility in generating and sustaining their own points of view and for choosing a different response (Block, 1993). People do not naturally see that it is their own expectations, their own responses to success and failure, and their own conversations about these things that are the source of the three points of view. The process of reclaiming responsibility brings an opportunity for movement (Smith & Berg, 1987) and the creation of different responses and points of view.

Finally, closure conversations need to explicitly acknowledge that new possibilities and new futures now exist as a result of what has happened (Ford & Ford, 1995). Whether the change was completely, partially, or not at all successful, the future contains possibilities, opportunities, and problems that are different from those that existed before the change effort. Conversations for closure allow people to complete their past with respect to issues and events involving change, and to move on (Albert, 1983; Bridges, 1980) to once again get in touch with their genuine commitments from the past or to generate new commitments altogether.

Resistance Reducing Strategies

Traditional approaches for dealing with resistance treat resistance as a phenomenon that occurs in response to the current change situation, i.e., what is

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happening now, with this change. This view implies that if managers can handle the current change situation properly, including the personal feelings and the assessments of their staff, then resistance will be minimized and ultimately overcome. Accordingly, managers try to use resistance reduction strategies that address those issues that appear to arise in response to the current change (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979) or bypass (ignore) resistance all together (Hermon-Taylor, 1985).

The perspective offered here differs substantially from this situational approach by proposing that underlying points of view generate resistive behaviors which are independent of how well the situational factors of a change are handled, and that unless and until these points of view are themselves addressed and changed, resistance will continue. In fact, the point of view perspective implies that all traditional attempts at reducing resistance will be seen through the perceptual filter of the point of view. For example, involvement, education, and participation are among the strategies recommended for dealing with resistance (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979; Morris & Raben, 1995). However, from the cynical point of view, such strategies are likely to be seen as attempts by untrustworthy people to get others to buy into something that isn't in their interest and that won't work. Similarly, attempts to increase the credibility of management (Kouzes & Posner, 1993) will be viewed cynically, with resignation, or with complacency. This implies that attempts to overcome point of view resistance through traditional, "situation" oriented strategies will reinforce the point of view and generate more resistance.

The reason that traditional resistance reduction strategies are unlikely to work is because they tend to rely on some form of increased understanding or involvement from those who appear to be resisting (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979). In this respect, they are directed at producing first order Alpha or Beta change in participants (Golembiewski, et al., 1976; Levy & Merry, 1986; Thompson & Hunt, 1996). With first order change, there is a shift in one's assessment of something (e.g., from agree to strongly agree) or the metric used for making the assessment, but there is no change in the underlying point of view. The difficulty with applying strategies for improving understanding or increasing involvement for people who have complacent, resigned, or cynical points of view is that neither understanding nor involvement is the issue. What is at issue is responsibility and completion and the possibility of changing a mindset, which requires second order or Gamma changes (Golembiewski, et al., 1976; Levy & Merry, 1986; Thompson & Hunt, 1996). It is our assertion that complacency, resignation, and cynicism are points of view to which people are blind. That is, they do not see the world as being given to them by their point of view, but rather they see that the world is a certain way and they are simply reporting the facts as they see them. Changing points of view, therefore, involves making people aware that they are operating in a socially constructed point of view and that they are not limited to that point of view (Marzano, et al., 1995).

We propose that one way to deal with complacent, resigned, and cynical points of view is through reinvention (Goss, et al., 1993). Reinvention, which involves reframing (Dunbar, et al., 1996; Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996; Levy & Merry, 1986), entails creating a new possibility for the future, preferably a future that past experiences and current predictions would indicate is impossible. Reinvention requires an inquiry into the

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context (point of view) from which one interacts with and interprets the world with the intent of uncovering that context. Once the context is revealed, and people can be responsible for it, it is possible to create a new point of view. Creating this new point of view constitutes a second order (Levy & Merry, 1986), Gamma (Thompson & Hunt, 1996), or ontological change (Marzano, et al., 1995). In this sense, reinvention is not about changing what is, but creating what isn't. Without creating a new context or point of view, people will continue doing what they have been doing. When a new point of view is generated, the foundation on which people construct their understanding or "framing" of the world is altered, as are their actions (Goss, et al., 1993).

Where people only bring one point of view to change, we say that they are stuck in that point of view (Smith & Berg, 1987). That is, they have a "fixed way of being" (Winograd & Flores, 1987) in which they engage in a consistent and repetitive way of relating to and interacting with change. Managers who respond as if the resistance can be overcome through an alteration in the ways in which they manage and lead change may be missing the point. Where resistive behaviors and communications stem from a point of view, resistance is not a function of management actions in the present, but of the fulfillment of employee expectations in the past, the employees' responses to fulfilled and unfulfilled expectations, and the conversations that create their future as a product of that past. From this perspective, the only way to effectively deal with resistance is to have people engage in conversations for completing their past, examine their responsibility for the way things have seemed to be, and invent a new point of view with its concomitant new possibilities for an attractive future and opportunities to act for that future.

Table 1
Resistance-Engendering Points of View

Point of View	Disposition	Develops in Response to:	Orientation to Self and Others	Relation to Future
Complacent	Satisfaction, comfort, contentment. Things are fine or acceptable the way they are.	success	I/we is/are already doing the right things. What others are doing is of no real interest or concern to me/us.	positive, optimistic; past will continue; I could change it, but why should or why would I?
Resigned	Hopelessness, powerlessness, apathy, defeated Things are not right but I can't do anything to make it better.	failure	I/we am/are unable to make a difference. (There must be something wrong with me/us) Others are able to make a difference: they have done it or are doing it.	negative, pessimistic; past will continue; I can't change it, but others can.
Cynical	Hostility, resentment, behind the back There is something wrong with the world and those who try to change it."	failure	I/we can't make any difference because things really are this way, permanently. Others can't make a difference either and they are lying if they say they can.	negative, pessimistic; past will continue; I can't change it and neither can anyone else.

Table 2
Sources of Resistance and Underlying Points of View

Statement Illustrating Resistance	Personal Experience or Assessment	Possible Underlying Point of View
The risk is unwarranted because we could lose everything good that we have.	fear	Complacency
We don't understand why a change is needed.	uncertainty	Complacency
We think you are crying wolf about what will happen if we don't change and we don't like it.	resentment	Complacency
We will fail again.	fear	Resignation
We don't think we can make this work.	uncertainty	Resignation
We couldn't do it before, we can't do it now.	resentment	Resignation
We thought they would involve us and treat us as equals, but they don't do that for us.	lack of trust, involvement, or participation	Resignation
They don't understand us or our circumstances, or what we really can or can't do.	misunderstandings or different assessments	Resignation

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They have betrayed us and this change is just another attempt to get something by us.	lack of trust, involvement, or participation	Cynicism
Who are they kidding, they have no control over any of this, no one does.	issues about control	Cynicism
They will never see things our way, and this change is a cover-up for their true agenda.	misunderstandings or different assessments	Cynicism

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