Managing Resistance to Change or Readiness to Change?

Cahier de recherche : 04-02
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January 2004
Managing Resistance to Change or Readiness to Change?¹

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Cahier n° 04-02 – January 2004

Abstract

Managing people during an organizational change is a key competency for all managers and change management practitioners. Should they focus on resistance to change or promote readiness to change among their employees? This paper explores both paradigms and examines four issues:

1. Should resistance to change be overcome?
2. How can one better understand individuals during times of change and which models are valid?
3. Which managerial actions are the most effective?
4. How can one determine if the transition is progressing toward the desired change?

A practical conceptualization for understanding and helping employees adapt to the change is then proposed.

Subjects

- Organizational change
- Resistance to change
- Organizational behavior
- Studies
- Models

¹ The research reported in this paper was partly funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The principal author gratefully acknowledges this support.

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Introduction

Many recent studies underscore that the low success rate of many change initiatives may be due to poor change leadership and insufficient attention being paid to the “people issues”. An organizational transformation perturbs an established system in many ways, particularly among the people who are directly affected by the change. In dealing with and adjusting to the change, employees manifest numerous reactions. Managers who oversee the day-to-day implementation of these transformations are often not very familiar with these reactions, and they are uncertain about how best to help their employees quickly adapt to the change.

The aim of this article is to discuss four issues that managers on duty frequently face regarding the individuals’ willingness to change:

1) Should resistance to change be overcome?

2) How can one better understand individuals (the human aspect) during times of change and which models are valid?

3) Which managerial actions are the most effective?

4) How can one determine whether the transition is progressing towards the desired change?

Every question will be treated as a challenge. For each issue, we will examine the current state of knowledge, the observed weaknesses in the different models, the results from an empirical longitudinal study (with repeated measurements), and the implications for implementing the change.

Bridges (1991) is one of the first to have distinguished the terms "change" and "transition." The renowned author contends that change refers to the actual modification in the environment, going from Point A to Point B, and transition signifies the state of turbulence experienced by an individual while the change is being implemented. During this period, those affected by a change must discard their old work habits and adopt or learn new ones. Despite the acknowledged importance of transition, there are very few practical tools or models for understanding and handling this transition period, which is often imposed on individuals.

Managers who wish to implement a change successfully are often uncertain about how to manage their employees during this period. Some management texts suggest that managers diverge from everyday management and pay special attention to this turbulent time. This article proposes suggestions for effectively managing employees during a change, along with a discussion of a paradigm shift.

Challenge 1: Should resistance to change be overcome?

The literature on transition, i.e. the period when those affected by a change are feeling uncertain and must change their habits, largely deals with the idea of resistance to change. Even in the most recent management works, the dominant theme in the traditional view of reaction to organizational change is resistance to change. This seemingly unavoidable component of studies of human factors was popularized by Coch and French in their 1947 article, "Overcoming resistance to change," which has...
since become a classic. Resistance to change is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored, as evidenced by the numerous articles published on the subject over the last 50-plus years. Resistance to change is often defined (Brassard, 1998) as being the implicit or explicit expression of negative reactions, a defense against the intended change, or restrictive forces that are opposed to the reorganization of conduct and the acquisition of new competences. Arkowitz (2002) presents an integrative perspective on resistance; he describes the phenomena of resistance at the behavioral, interpersonal, cognitive and affective levels. Resistance is also objectified as a socio-psychological phenomenon that exists “over there” in the individual (Dent and Goldberg, 1999a). This highly personal phenomenon can be conscious or unconscious. More recently, authors (Ford, Ford and McNamara, 2002) have advocated that resistance be considered a socially constructed reality, a public phenomenon found in the interactions in which people engage.

Resistance to change has been studied extensively and is no doubt the bête noire of anyone who proposes ideas involving change. Resistance to change is often synonymous with fear, anxiety, apprehension, hostility, intrigue, delay, polarization, conflict and impatience. It often results in interventions that take longer than anticipated, lower morale, and are very costly, emotionally, for the entire organization. Resistance usually starts to show up as soon as the change is announced, and it often continues more or less intensely throughout the entire implementation process and sometimes even after the change is completed.

There is a wealth of documentation on resistance to change: the many faces of resistance, their meanings, their sources, their consequences, and the mechanisms of managing resistance (that will be explored in Challenge 3). Regarding the causes of resistance, Kets de Vries and Miller (1984) and Krantz (1999) emphasize the psychoanalytical causes linked to defense mechanisms, while Arkowitz (2002) views resistance as determined by intrapersonal and interpersonal factors that can occur with or without conscious awareness. Along with individual causes, Kegan and Lahey (2001) argue that resistance to change is a form of personal immunity to change where the employee has an unrecognized competing commitment. Trader-Leigh (2002) studied the variables related to resistance and identified factors that underlie resistance: self-interest, psychological impact, tyranny of custom, culture compatibility, and political effect. Ford, Ford and McNamara (2002) contend that resistance to change is a function of the ongoing background conversations that are being spoken, and which create the context for both the change initiative and the responses to it.

Kotter and Schlesinger (1979) add other elements: fear of losing something important and misunderstanding the change. Scott and Jaffe (1989) explain resistance by several types of loss associated with giving up something that has been acquired and is satisfactory: loss of security, loss of power, loss of usefulness, loss of competence, loss of social relations, loss of sense of direction, and loss of territory. This notion of loss was cited by Dent and Goldberg (1999b) in their reply to Krantz (1999): “if we had to choose one term for what the literature suggests as to why people do resist, it would be loss … loss of the known… loss of status.” In fact, those affected are not actually resisting the change itself, but more what it represents. This representation of how we understand the phenomenon linked to the concept of the “losses experienced” is necessary, although partial; it represents only one of many preoccupations that those affected by a change experience throughout the change implementation. This preoccupation will be discussed below.

Despite the many attempts to understand resistance, several weaknesses of this perspective should be acknowledged. First, the previous studies do not successfully predict when or under which specific conditions resistance will appear; the phenomenon of resistance is elusive. Second, this concept has never been operationalized with a standardized instrument. To our knowledge, there are no reliable
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and valid measures of resistance apart from analytical grids that offer a general indication of resistance to change. Third, attempts to measure resistance to change often entail the participation of a third party, who is involved in the situation and therefore not neutral. It should be noted that people do not use the term resistance self-referentially; that is they do not say that they are resisting change. Often someone else interprets their behavior as resistance; it seems to be a perceptual phenomenon that is attributed by another person. Fourth, in our practice with organizations undergoing change, we have noticed that managers hesitate to speak openly with employees about resistance to change, for fear of amplifying the phenomenon. Managers are also reluctant to openly admit their own resistance, for fear of reprisals by top management. Merron (1993) noted the difficulty of working with the concept of resistance, which has a negative connotation. Fifth, the interventions suggested often require a fairly in-depth understanding of psychology and psychotherapeutic approaches that few managers venture to use. Sixth, several authors (Dent & Goldberg, 1999b) have criticized the “corrosive and destructive use of the concept of resistance to change” and are revisiting the results of studies, using parameters that are better adapted and more operational. In an analysis of real-life cases, Brassard (1998) notes how disconcerting the phenomenon of resistance to change is and proposes that resistance might be the rational or sensible explanation of actors’ behavior, considered from their point of view and within a given context. Other scholars have acknowledged resistance as being a necessary part of the adaptation process. Kotter (1996) adds, and rightly so, the notion of constraint in relation to change: not all individuals necessarily resist change, but will resist it if the change is forced upon them.

The idea of “overcoming” resistance to change seems to involve passing judgment both on those affected by the change, who will, “of course,” oppose it, and managers, who will, “of course,” clash with them in their ultimate attempt to help the transition pass. This model upholds the hypothesis/presumption that if employees resist, it is because the change is being mismanaged. It is viewed as the modernist perspective.

In contrast, a constructivist and postmodernist perspective considers that different people at different moments live in different realities, as Ford, Ford and McNamara (2002) suggest. People’s realities must be captured with a dynamic scenario. This new paradigm specifies that people experience realities that are legitimate and specific in time, which could be better captured with a dynamic model of reactions. The “readiness to change” paradigm suggests that during the change, people legitimately question it, which constitutes an opportunity for them to obtain feedback on their thoughts and needs at a specific time. Moreover, managers may prepare and increase this readiness by diagnosing and managing people’s evolving preoccupations about change.

Challenge 2: How can one better understand individuals during times of change and which models are valid?

Beyond the concept of resistance, other ways of understanding individuals during times of organizational change are worth exploring. Some theoreticians have put forth an evolutionary chronology of the reactions. In addition, dynamic models have been proposed to better understand the reactions of those affected during a change. Bareil and Savoie (1999) published a re-reading and summary of many dynamic models describing the various reactions of those affected by change and made an essay on integrating various dynamic models of individual change. In fact, some models deal with emotions associated with change, as grief and denial. Kübler-Ross (1969) is renowned for her intensive study of the pre-death period and Perlman and Takacs (1990) defined ten human emotions...
associated with change. Still other models (Beckhard & Pritchard, 1992; Bridges, 1991; Kyle, 1993; Lewin, 1952; Schein, 1980) refer to sequential schemas that specify the end of a state of satisfaction (unfreezing stage), a period of transition (changing stage) and, finally, a renewal (refreezing stage) or the beginning of a new period.

These grids and models rely more on the user’s discretionary judgment, have rarely dependable instrumentation, and in some cases lack published proof of their validity. Although these conceptualizations, grids and explanations may legitimize the often-negative reactions of the individuals affected, they do not clarify the emergence, duration, or disappearance of the reactions. They offer few means for measuring these reactions and even fewer for intervening judiciously.

To deal with such a difficulty, we used eight focus groups to test the pertinence, usefulness of and the difference between two questions about individuals’ reactions in a situation of organizational change; measuring affective and cognitive levels of reactions. The two questions were: “How is the change affecting you?” and “What are your preoccupations about the change?” In our analyses and interpretations that supported the recommendations for managing a transition proposed to our corporate client, these two questions clearly appeared to represent two distinct phenomena. The first question evinced the cycle of emotions to a greater degree (e.g. I’m afraid; I’m frustrated), while the second elicited rational, cognitive, and operational content that could lead to specific paths of action (e.g., I’m afraid I’ll lose my job; I would need information about…). When those affected by a change are asked about how they are experiencing it, they tend to respond using all sorts of emotions, which are legitimate and understandable but not easily operational in terms of management’s response to facilitating the transition. A priori, the only interesting response seems to be empathetic listening. In contrast, preoccupations involve content that is cognitive, conscious and rational, easily identifiable (with no need for psychological interpretation as in the case of behavior associated with resistance to change), and leads to targeted action by management.

To better understand this concept of “concern,” a review of the literature was performed in several databases and search engines (Emerald, PsycLIT, ProQuest, ERIC). In the ERIC databank, we found a model of Stages of Concern developed by researchers from the “Research and Development Center for Teacher Education” at the University of Texas at Austin (Hall, George and Rutherford, 1986). Following Fuller (1969), a psychologist who studied teachers’ concerns, Hall and his team developed a model of change that sheds light on the individual perspective of change among teachers dealing with the arrival of computers and a large variety of new educational programs. The Stages of Concern approach was chosen because of its empirically verified theoretical foundation, its measurement instruments for collecting data directly from those affected, its legitimacy in the eyes of managers and those affected, and the possibilities it offers for targeting interventions.

Hall and Hord (1987, p. 59) define a “concern” as a “mental activity composed of questioning, analyzing, and re-analyzing, considering alternative actions and reactions, and anticipating consequences”. To be concerned means to be in a mentally aroused state about something. More recently, Hall and Hord (2001, p. 57) wrote: “In fact there is a developmental pattern to how our feelings and perceptions evolve as the change process unfolds, which we have named the Stages of Concern”. To expand on this concept of concern, specialized psychology, management and education dictionaries and encyclopedias (Clark & Neave, 1992; Corsini, 1994; Ramachandran, 1994) were of little use, because neither the word “preoccupation” nor the word “concern” was found in them. These two words do not seem to be part of the jargon in psychology, management or education. Thus, the definitions from more ordinary dictionaries where a preoccupation seems to be synonymous with concern, had to suffice. Specifically, the term preoccupation is defined as an anxiety, a worry or a
consideration (Simpson and Weiner, 1989). Preoccupy means to occupy the person’s mind or the attention or to absorb, to take the attention of, to the exclusion of other matters (Password).

We profoundly think, based on our past studies, that a preoccupation signifies a concern, a worry or anxiety. It has a specific content upon which one can intervene. It seems to be linked more closely to a cognitive content, targeted in relation to a change, and prior to the appearance of a behavior, or even to what triggers the behavior, that might lead to a wide range of actions. Preoccupation seems to express a reality that is more experienced and perceived than felt by those affected by a change. It seems more neutral than adversarial. In the context of a change, it might signify a desire (to know), an expectation, or anything that could cause a problem in the individual’s transition. Individual by nature, it also seems to manifest itself collectively. In our studies with many focus groups, we were able to confirm that different groups had similar preoccupations at corresponding moments. Preoccupations also appear to be temporal and dynamic.

According to Hall’s conceptualization, anyone affected by change is liable to experience different “universal” preoccupations, regardless of the type of change or the individual’s personality. Each concern monopolizes the individual’s mind to a certain degree. We attempted to build on Hall’s model of seven Stages of Concern by trying to generalize the model to an organizational environment other than that of education. Blanchard (1992) had expanded Hall’s Concerns Based Adoption Model in a management perspective in a brief paper. We therefore adapted the questionnaire to transformational change and organizational and manufacturing environments. All of our studies, focused on MRPII/ERP implementations, are longitudinal (obligatory to study dynamic models). In this article we present an example of the results of one of our longitudinal studies, which involved taking three measurements of a clientele of 115 individuals affected by a major technological change.

To verify the validity of the content and existence of the seven preoccupations, a preliminary study was made of 94 individuals affected by an integrated system, which comprised 82% of the population of those affected by this change (115 people). By performing factor analyses, we validated the existence of seven types of preoccupations present in those affected by a change. The first factor analysis, unrestricted, reveals a 9-factor structure that explains 66.7% of the variance, while an imposed 7-factor structure of fixed components explains 60.3% of the variance, yielding values of over 1.25; which supports the construct validity of the seven preoccupations. This result tends to confirm the 7 Stages of Concern Model, initially designed by Hall (1975) for teachers experiencing the implementation of a new academic program. Further studies confirmed this structure.

As the model illustrates, all individuals affected by a change seem more or less intensely concerned during its implementation; first by personal preoccupations, next by the object of the change, followed by the social and organizational aspects. They are concerned about losses, related to job security and/or responsibilities; management’s will to change; the kind of change that is imminent; the support that will be offered; and the possibility of working with others to implement and improve the change. They may also feel unconcerned by the change. These seven types of preoccupations make it easier to understand the “black box” of individual reactions regarding organizational change. They identify situations that are operational and fairly modifiable without the need for discretionary judgment or psychological inference, as is the case for several emotional models. The preoccupations reveal priority areas for action during the transition. They thus allow us to better understand what the individuals being affected are going through and then act accordingly.
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Consistently with studies reported by Bareil (1998; 2001) and Bareil and Boffo (2003), the order of the Phases evinced by this research differs slightly from that of Hall and Hord (1987); this new order is illustrated in Table I.

Table I. The seven Phases of Preoccupations

Phase 1 – No preoccupation
Phase 2 – Impacts on Self
Phase 3 – Seriousness of change
Phase 4 – Nature of change
Phase 5 – Support & Self capacity to change
Phase 6 – Collaboration
Phase 7 – Continuous improvement

Phase 1 (no preoccupation regarding change), Phase 6 (collaboration), and Phase 7 (continued improvement of change) are at the extremities, in keeping with the order in the theory of Stages of Concern. Note that the sequence of Phases 2 through 5 differs from that of Hall (1976). Our research could not confirm an immutable order of Phases 2 through 5, but did highlight two successive groups of two Phases. The detailed description of each Phase of Preoccupations can be found in Table II.
### Table II. Definitions and expressions of the seven Phases of Preoccupations

**Preoccupations of those affected by change:**

**Phase 1. No preoccupation**
The individuals affected do not feel personally concerned by the change—they continue their normal activities and act “as if nothing is going on.” They remain indifferent and comfortable in regard to the organizational change.

Commonly expressed as: “It doesn’t matter to me; there’s nothing to worry about.”

**Phase 2. Impacts on Self**
The individuals affected are worried about how the change will affect them and their job. They wonder about keeping their job after the change has been implemented and about the consequences of the change on their role, responsibilities, status, and decisional power. They no longer have the impression of being in control or knowing what to expect, and they wonder about their place in the organization.

Commonly expressed as: “What’s going to happen to me?”

**Phase 3. Seriousness of change**
Individuals wonder about the impacts and consequences of the change on the organization. They want to verify whether or not their investment in time and energy will be worth it. They wonder how serious the organization is about maintaining the change in the longer term and if the change will be profitable.

Commonly expressed as: “Is the change here to stay?”

**Phase 4. Nature of change**
Individuals move out of their comfort zone and begin to wonder about the exact nature of the change. They look for answers to their questions about the change. Individuals become attentive and pro-active and look for information about the change: what it is, and when and how it will be done.

Commonly expressed as: “Can you tell me exactly what this change is all about?”

**Phase 5. Support and self capacity to change**
Individuals feel ready to conform to the prescribed change and try it out. However, they feel somewhat incompetent in regard to the new functions, skills, and attitudes. They are worried about being able to succeed, which is why they wonder about the time, conditions, help, and support available. They want to be sure that they can successfully adopt the change.

Commonly expressed as: “Am I going to be able to…?”

**Phase 6. Collaboration**
Individuals show interest in working and cooperating with others. They wish to share their experience with colleagues and ask about how they do things. They want to become involved in implementing the change.

Commonly expressed as: “It would be worth it to get together…”

**Phase 7. Continuous improvement**
Individuals look for new challenges. They want to improve what already exists, by making major changes to their work area or responsibilities, or through new uses or applications of the change. Individuals question their methods of work and wish to improve or generalize the change.

Commonly expressed as: “Let’s try this… If we did that…”

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The first Phase of preoccupations is indifference (Phase 1), where the individual affected seems little concerned about the change and is busy pursuing his or her daily activities as though nothing unusual was occurring. The meaning of Phase 1 as well as the correlational analyses clearly indicate that it differs from the other Phases of “preoccupations.” During the second Phase, the person affected becomes more concerned with the losses brought about by the change. These losses, often associated with the phenomenon of resistance as explanatory causes for resistance behavior, seem to be only one of the Phases of preoccupations that the individuals affected experience when faced with change. If they find satisfactory responses to their first preoccupations, they will then be assured of the seriousness and will of management to carry out the change (Phase 3) before investing themselves in it. However, Phases 2 and 3 may sometimes be inverted or occur simultaneously. In general, only after the Phase 2 and 3 preoccupations have been appeased will the individual affected be open to more precise information concerning the nature of the change (Phase 4) and consider the available support (in terms of training, coaching, supervision, etc.) provided by the organization (Phase 5). Once again, Phases 4 and 5 may be inverted. In addition, those affected will be interested in opportunities to work with others because they will want to share their new knowledge and discover what others are doing (Phase 6). They will later think of ways to improve their work through modifications or will devise other changes that could replace the current change (Phase 7).

The model of Phases of Preoccupations seems to effectively provide a better understanding of individuals who are in a situation of organizational change. This valid diagnostic model leads to interventions that we will discuss in the following section.
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Challenge 3: Which managerial actions are the most effective?

In opposition to the traditional view of resistance to change, which tends to blame the individuals, certain authors (Coch & French, 1948; Lawrence, 1969) initially studied ways that management could neutralize and overcome resistance to change. Prescriptions subsequently emerged for what management could do to overcome such resistance. Kotter and Schlesinger (1979) proposed traditional strategies for reducing resistance: involvement, education, and participation. The attitudes a manager should adopt run the gamut from complete respect for resistance to total disregard for it. These management actions are unilateral, defensive and force managers to react.

Nevertheless, literature on managing the transition period recommends that managers periodically survey the reactions of those affected; quickly detect and correct what does not work; continually remind those affected of the objectives of the change; exchange ideas directly with these individuals as often as possible; pay attention to people; highlight efforts and provide support to keep energy levels high (Collerette, Delisle, & Perron, 1997, p. 156). Collerette and Schneider (1996) also propose a series of useful measures in relation to each possible cause of resistance to change. Furthermore, managers can decide to listen to, deny or ignore resistance (Scott & Jaffe, 1989). If planning has been well carried out and a little training is offered, the change will putatively take place by itself, a theory contested by Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, and Hall (1987).

These vague suggestions regarding intervention generates uncertainty and misunderstanding, while underscoring the need for a rigorous, comprehensive method of analysis to allow managers to make judicious choices in intervention strategies. We agree with Dent and Goldberg’s (1999a) assertion that “Labeling … these difficult problems as resistance to change only impedes the change effort…. Making changes effectively in organizations requires specific, targeted action and … to develop strategies for dealing with more specific losses….“ Actions should focus more on prevention and on bringing together the individuals affected and the organization.

The Phases of Preoccupations model is amenable to this new paradigm. Preoccupations are not caused by a poor quality of change management, as was implied in the traditional view of resistance to change where resistance had to be “overcome.” On the contrary, preoccupations emerge among individuals affected when they feel listened to and important, and when they trust management to respond to their needs (Brassard, 1998). Evidently, frequently asking people about their preoccupations regarding change is the key to managing people during a change and building their readiness to change.

Listening and diagnosing reactions according to knowledge of the Phases of Preoccupations enables managers to understand and adapt their managerial actions so that employees may quickly channel their efforts into the change. This approach to communication is much more concrete than the conventional key principles in organizational and change communications. Although it offers a more detailed two-way communication structure than the communication strategy described by Klein (1996), this theory refers to differentiated communication tactics during different phases of organizational change. The managerial actions refer also to the transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1990), whereby a leader is characterized by his or her charisma, initiative, skill in motivating personnel, and ability to consider everyone’s needs, the latter component being the most important aspect of the framework of change management based on the Phases of Preoccupations. These leaders consider the individual as a whole person and bear in mind previous conversations held with this person, which naturally fosters the emergence of preoccupations. It is also important that managerial
actions and organizational gestures be better targeted to respond to the emerging needs of those affected by change.

An approach based on preoccupations, which are both collective and individual, seems better suited to targeting interventions than an approach based on emotions, which are solely individual. Understanding the content of the Phases of Preoccupations Model lets managers adapt their actions in a targeted way, during the whole period of change (prior to change, during change and after change). Several targeted, sequential interventions can respond to emerging preoccupations. Managers can act in a way that respects their personal style and skills. While overseeing the implementation of change seems to be very daunting for managers, they would benefit from devoting sufficient time to diagnosing the needs and preoccupations of employees and addressing them satisfactorily throughout the process. The transition time will thus be minimized and the change will be more likely to produce the desired results. A coherent intervention strategy requires anticipating the various reactions or, even better, a sequential order of the emergence of their preoccupations. Using Hall’s methodology, we established the relative proximity and order of preoccupations; notably according to the “Phases of preoccupations”. Having discovered and confirmed a logic to the preoccupations, we can more easily target useful avenues more precisely when a plan to implement a change is being formulated. This chronological sequence of Phases of Preoccupations makes it possible to be more specific about the meaning and direction of the evolution of preoccupations among those affected by the change. Concomitantly, the choice of strategies and tactics to adopt is facilitated. Managers can adapt their daily interventions according to the current preoccupations of their employees and to a certain degree they can anticipate their reactions. We propose a list of managerial actions (see Table III) that can contribute responding to employees’ changing needs in a timely manner.
Table III. Guide for targeted, sequential interventions

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<th>Phase of preoccupations</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Types of intervention</th>
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| 1. No preoccupation      | Destabilize                                 | - Present verifiable facts and data  
- Share enough, but not too much, information  
- Involve those affected by the change in discussions and decisions  
- Encourage those affected to talk with others about the change |
| 2. Impact on Self        | Reassure or keep informed                   | - Legitimize the existence and expression of personal preoccupations  
- Keep individuals informed about everything the change implies regarding their job and their responsibilities as information becomes available  
- Discuss the consequences of the change on their work method |
| 3. Seriousness of change | Clarify choices                              | - Clarify organizational issues and the reasons behind the choice to change  
- Clarify the change’s more long-term impacts on the organization  
- Demonstrate determination in regard to the results to be attained |
| 4. Nature of change      | Inform                                      | - Inform and communicate about what the change is, the plan to implement it, and its advantages and inconveniences  
- Invite outsiders who have experienced the same change to come discuss it, or visit other places where it has been introduced |
| 5. Support               | Allay feelings of incompetence              | - Reassure employees about their skills by telling them how much time they have to get used to the change, the kind of help and support available, etc.  
- Clarify the “how to”s  
- Demonstrate practical solutions |
| 6. Collaboration         | Share                                       | - Provide opportunities for exchanging with colleagues  
- Use these individuals as agents of change or technical aides  
- Form work teams |
| 7. Continuous improvement| Valuing expertise                            | - Encourage new suggestions  
- Create networks of experts  
- Encourage these individuals to try out their improvements and to pilot these projects |

Although these preoccupations emerge individually, we noted that some types of preoccupations are also collective. A majority of the individuals affected tend to react in the same way at the same time. This means that managers can begin by intervening with the entire team and then respond to the more specific preoccupations of individuals.
Challenge 4: Determining whether the transition is progressing toward the desired change

In the management approach to the transition phase, great importance is placed on the rhythm needed to successfully implement a change. Collerette and Schneider (1996, p. 175) propose three rates of speed: slow, accelerated, and step-by-step. They describe the advantages, risks, and contingencies of each. They use traditional criteria to determine the rate of change related to the environment, situation, and type of innovation or change. Indeed, in many technological migrations, a technical calendar for introducing the change dictates the rate, with no regard for the “human” rhythm of transition (Bridges, 1991). The theory of Phases of Preoccupations offers a new and different criterion for determining the rate of change: the reactions of the people affected by the change. This theory assumes that each phase has an intensity related to a given moment of the transition. The early phases, which are more intense at the beginning of change, subside and give way to subsequent phases that become more present in the individual’s cognitive schema, much like the way waves break on a beach. This variation in intensity depends on the individual.

To statistically measure these variations in the intensity of the Phases of preoccupations over time, we conducted a groundbreaking study in this field. Using a longitudinal methodology (three measurements were taken of the same individuals, although there were fewer for the second [n=67] and third [n=44] measurements) and ANOVA statistical analysis (3 * 7), we were able to verify the principal effects and interactions between the parameters of “time and Phases.” The ANOVA analysis shows the significant interaction of the two main effects: time and Phases [F (12.492) = 5.66, p < .01], while respecting the postulates of homogeneity of variances. This result implies that the intensity of the Phases varies not only according to time, but also according to the position of the Phase in the model. Using the Tukey-A technique to compare means a posteriori, we identified the Phases in which intensity had varied significantly. Four of the seven Phases varied in intensity between the measurements taken at Time 1 and those taken at Times 2 and 3, but not between Times 2 and 3 (probably too close together). As implementation progressed, Phases 2 (job security), 4 (nature of change), and 5 (available support) diminished significantly in intensity, probably because they were satisfactorily addressed. Phase 7 (improvement of change) increased in intensity towards the end of implementation, confirming that the movement of the Phases is like a breaking wave, as postulated by Hall. The low intensity of Phase 1 (no preoccupations) was not modified because this Phase was already over when the Time 1 measurements were taken, as was the case for Times 2 and 3. Phase 6, which refers to working with others, remained stable and high throughout the two months of the study, probably because it corresponded closely to the culture of cooperation and accountability prevailing in the enterprise. The stability of Phase 3 (seriousness of change) can be explained by the history of success of previous changes. Management and the change agent told us in interviews that the employees had a generally favorable attitude towards changes implemented, probably because of the support provided and the managerial style. Overall, the affected employees trust the management and realize that every effort has been made to ensure the success of the implementation and the sustainability of the change. These data support the hypothesis that the intensity of most Phases of preoccupations varies over the course of the transition, which seems to reflect their dynamism. The intensity of the first Phases of preoccupations (Phases 2 to 5, with the exception of 3) tends to diminish, while the intensity of a later Phase (Phase 7) grows. These significant variations in the intensity of certain phases of preoccupations were noted within a very

1 The experimental mortality rate is unavoidable in this type of research. No significant difference (univariate analyses of variance) was obtained according to age or sex among the individuals who answered the questionnaire once, twice, or three times. The samples are representative of the target population.
short time period (about ten weeks), whereas other longitudinal studies (Bareil, 2001; Hall & Hord, 1987; Rutherford, 1977; Rioux, Bareil and Ethier, 2003) noted differences during changes taking place over a period of several years.

The model of Phases of preoccupations thus makes it easier to deal with the rhythm of change. The energy and interventions required will depend on the ability of the individuals affected by the change to adjust and adapt to the change. The variation in intensity of a Phase of preoccupations will help managers ascertain whether they need to continue intervening in regard to the same concern, stop and move on to the next concern, or go back and respond to earlier preoccupations. To help individuals appropriate the change, managers should not only respond to the high-intensity Phase or Phases, but also foster the emergence of the preoccupations of later phases (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987). Revealing the upcoming phase to the individual is recommended in order to accelerate the appropriation process.

The model of preoccupations also makes it possible and legitimate for a work team to self-manage interventions, because it allows individuals in a group affected by change to take charge of themselves. By identifying their preoccupations, they can pinpoint solutions to meet their needs. The advantage of this approach is that it respects the rhythm of individuals, without encouraging anarchy. The individuals self-regulate their learning and proceed through the change at their own pace. Reactions to change are thus fully acknowledged instead of making people feel guilty, as often happens when this phenomenon is analyzed strictly from the angle of resistance or personality. This perspective is part of the stream of double-loop organizational learning whereby the individual or group learns to question old habits in order to convert them into new, better-adapted ones. Such action is beneficial to the individuals, who no longer find themselves isolated but instead acknowledged in their own evolution. However, it runs counter to the traditional concept of transition management, which accords a preponderant, if not exclusive, role to managers.

Accordingly, the onus is on managers and management of the organization to correctly target the rhythm and needs of those affected and to respond to them adequately, through consciousness-raising, communication, training, and so forth. Adapting the cadence of change to the rhythm of those affected by the change requires a new vision of change, which is in harmony with humanistic perspectives, organizational development (Weisbord, 1987) and the sociotechnical systems approach to organizations (Trist, Susman and Brown, 1977).
Conclusion

The model of Phases of Preoccupations, which integrates the fields of psychology, education and management, provides a valid response to the four challenges brought up by managers concerning the conduct of change, and more precisely, allows management of the transition of people affected during an organizational change. First, it provides an operational, pragmatic alternative to resistance to change, by moving from the guilt-causing paradigm of resistance to a more legitimate and dynamic paradigm of creation of readiness to change, through the evolution of preoccupations. Second, the seven preoccupations of people affected by a change provide a better understanding of what individuals experience as the transition progresses. Third, it lets managers target their interventions sequentially and manage the rate of change with valid signposts, the preoccupations of those affected. As Trader-Leigh (2002) concludes, “leaders should develop guidelines for ethical behavior and interactions which includes development of a set of principles around how people are to be treated, informed and listened to”. This can be done with the Phases of Preoccupations Model where managers may build readiness for change, in keeping with employees’ concerns.

Other studies are needed to verify the generality of the results obtained. The longitudinal schema could be applied to other clienteles, in milieus that are introducing different types of strategic change. We hope to expand our knowledge of each phase with qualitative studies. Moreover, it would be worth investigating the preoccupations among different populations of workers, and determining whether they always follow the same sequence. Another fertile avenue of research would be to study the most effective intervention strategies associated with each of the seven Phases of Preoccupations.

This study illustrates the extent to which the current concept of organizational change is utopian, especially the conduct of change that excludes in particular the people affected by the change. Beyond the paradigm of overcoming resistance to change, a new paradigm calling for increasing the readiness for change by accompanying groups of people through their evolving Phases of Preoccupations seems to be a much more promising approach that could leverage the rate of success of many transformations.
Managing Resistance to Change or Readiness to Change?

References


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