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The Undiscussable Sides of Implementing Transformational Change

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Consultants who understand the inevitability of the emergence of unknown but predictable complexities during the implementation of planned organizational change are reluctant to inform their client systems' leaders. Those leaders do not want to hear about those complexities. Thus, they collude and perpetuate the false belief in reasonable but simplistic mental models that claim that complex system change can be implemented in a linear fashion—quickly and without undue inconvenience, disruption, or discomfort. This article has two sections: first, the most likely complexities, described in terms of a four-phase realistic mental model of systemic resistance during implementation; second, interventions that organizational leaders, line managers, and consultants should be prepared to enact (a) during each of the four phases, (b) throughout the transformational process, and (c) as needed on various occasions.

Today we hear and read about many organizational and management consulting gurus who market commercialized approaches to planning and implementing a broad range of transformative organizational changes. Each “change management” model is quite distinctive in some respects, and, yet, the models are remarkably similar in other respects.

Most models for managing change tend to define and treat all types of organizational issues as if they were problems. That triggers the perceived need to “solve” them, once and forever. This is an extraordinarily convenient premise, because not all challenging issues are “problems.” But the premise allows practitioners to market their preferred models as solutions that fit all types of organizational issues and circumstances: One size fits all.

This is rather curious. These people are probably not charlatans; they are probably honorable people. Furthermore, they are practical people. Their livelihood relies on building a trustworthy reputation leading to referrals and repeat business from satisfied customers. They know it is in their long-term, enlightened self-interest to promise only what they can deliver. They are probably wise enough to refrain from proposing models for managing change that, ultimately, will not be effective and will disappoint their customers, colleagues, and...

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This article represents much of the culmination of 18 years of work on the issue of resistance to implementing planned change. It is based, in part, on the presentation “Strategic Management of Organizational Change” delivered at AIC’s Industriproduktion i forandring—Utvecklat ledarskap i produktionen (Changes in the Production Industry—Developing Leadership Conference), Stockholm, Sweden, September 10, 1996.

I am greatly appreciative of the insights and editorial efforts provided by Marc Sokol of Personnel Decisions International (Arlington, VA) in preparing this article.

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managers. Yet they present universalistic solutions to particularistic (unique), complex, unprecedented issues.

I am of a different opinion. I believe that proponents of single models of organizational change have overgeneralized the applicability of their models. I am convinced that different types of issues and unique organizational circumstances require different strategies, philosophies, methods, and skills: in other words, a contingency approach to consulting.

I believe there are basically three types of organizational issues that leaders and members of transforming organizations must identify, set goals for, and develop both strategies and action plans around (followed by implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the effects of those plans). These issues are as follows.

Problems to solve: Either (a) something has been broken or does not work as needed and must be corrected, or (b) problems that have not yet manifested themselves (but clearly will occur, sooner or later) should be prevented.

Opportunities to exploit: Some existing business processes or practices may be functioning perfectly well; however, it is apparent that substantial benefits can be achieved through the application of a radical technological innovation (as measured in terms of profitability, quality, waste, cycle time, or productivity). On the other hand, (b) opportunities constantly emerge to create something totally new (e.g., goods, services, processes, configurations of existing technologies, or markets).

Dilemmas to manage: Organizational members are caught up in an apparent conflict in choosing which of several alternatives can best deal with an apparent problem (Johnson, 1992). The alternatives are often “polarities”: extreme endpoints on the same continuum (e.g., to centralize or decentralize or to reward employees on the basis of individual or team achievements). A single solution would create consistency; however, a solution that consistently reinforces either alternative would exclude the benefits available through the other polarity. This is a dilemma that people can begin to manage if they assume it may be possible to design a system that would reinforce and support both options.

I think it is imperative to make these distinctions because different approaches to managing complex systems change are required to deal with different types of issues appropriately. A perfectly good model for managing one kind of change, improperly applied under substantially different conditions, not only will fail to achieve the expected results but will also discredit those who designed the model as well as those who use it and sponsor it. In addition to the type of issue, leaders must also consider the organizational level at which a change is intended to take place. What may be an effective change model at one level may be irrelevant or counterproductive at any other level.

Organizational leaders—and their consultants—need a portfolio from which they can select relevant models for various issues and conditions. Those who rely on a single model for managing organizational change are likely to fulfill a prophetic Japanese saying: “If the only tool you have is a hammer, all you will see is nails.”

**The Process of Supporting and Facilitating Complex Systems Change**

Virtually all organizational change management models are derived—knowingly or not—from Dick Beckhard (1969; Beckhard & Harris, 1987; Beckhard & Pritchard, 1992). He and his associates suggested six “organizing principles” to provide a sense of order in guiding managerial thinking and action in coping with the challenges of managing complex change in turbulent and uncertain environments. These principles are as follows: (a) Why change? (determine the need for change and determine the degree
of choice about whether to change; (b) define the desired future state; (c) describe the present state; (d) compare the "desired" and "present" states; (e) determine how to get from here to there; and (f) manage during the transition state. (Particular attention must be paid to recognizing, respecting, managing, and using resistance to the change.)

Managing and Using Resistance to Sociotechnical Systems Change

A common element of all models for managing organizational change is the last detail identified by Beckhard: Manage and use resistance. Different practitioners and theorists devote varying amounts of attention to resistance. Many of those who are least attentive to resistance are quite technical in their orientation and approach to organizational change. It is as if they believe that, by installation of the proper innovation (e.g., a computer system, software, a total quality management [TQM] system, organizational structure, a training program, reengineered business processes, or operational procedures), resistance will be minimized, avoided, or simply overcome. They seem to believe that, once their innovation is installed and is working according to specifications, it will be quickly and easily adopted by appreciative organizational members and assimilated into the organization’s normal operations; that is, they consider the transformation to be complete, and people will simply adapt to its demands and requirements. Others use a pseudo-psychotherapeutic model for overcoming the resistance of individuals. The implicit assumption is that there is something “wrong” with individuals who resist, and they have to be “fixed.” Few models for managing resistance are comprehensive enough to guide leaders, planners, and implementers in managing the resistance that invariably occurs at all organizational levels. This allows decision makers to conveniently assume either that, over time, resistance will “go away” or that resistant individuals will change on their own or, if absolutely necessary, can be extruded and replaced.

The error of this logic is vividly illustrated by Champy and Hammer, the consultants who, together, popularized the technical-expert-driven (techspert-driven) “business process reengineering” (BPR) approach to transforming work. Each has recently offered individual explanations for the 70% dissatisfaction ratings of BPR by the leaders of organizations that were “reengineered.” Arguably reduced to basic terms, their explanation was it was the managers’ fault. They were not prepared for and did not know what to do about—or how to deal with—the unanticipated problems and dilemmas that were created or revealed by the BPR initiatives. Both of these techspert consultants are now—belatedly—focusing on the human and organizational ramifications of altering a technical element of an organization’s sociotechnical system (Champy, 1995; Hammer & Stanton, 1995).

I, like many organizational development (OD) practitioners, am dismayed by the obvious collusion between technical expert management consultants and the leaders of their client organizations in ignoring and failing to anticipate and prepare for the obvious fact that radical innovations are not easily understood, accepted, used, diffused or disseminated, and assimilated by organizational members who are addicted to a contrasting reality that is well established, familiar, and comfortable for them.

What is the basis of such willing collusion? Why is it that consultants, particularly techsperts, and their clients so eagerly and easily reinforce one another’s beliefs (or is it hopes?) that systemwide organizational changes created by radical innovations can be implemented quickly and easily, without precipitating side effects that cause inconvenience, confusion, self-doubt, or disruption of familiar (and comfortable)
routines for senior managers? I believe this collusion has everything to do with the convenient, implicit mental models (Senge, 1990) of many techsperts and organizational leaders that literally prescribe how organizational change is supposed to take place. The most dominant of these mental models is the Phoenix mental model (described later), which trivializes resistance phenomena and ignores their explicit management and use.

The key to understanding and managing unpredicted but inevitable implementation issues is a thorough familiarity with an explicit, practical model of resistance to sociotechnical change and its management—and use—at individual, team, subsystem, and organizational levels. Resistance must be understood to be a natural and inevitable response to virtually anything that is new or different. It cannot be ignored or avoided without risking disaster. In a diverse, democratic society, resistance cannot be overcome either by rational logic or by force. Neither does resistance have to be merely endured until, somehow, it goes away. It can be dealt with. There are four phases of resistance through which organizational leaders and members can be assisted to move through quickly, without facilitation and with minimal distress; through their experiences, these people can learn invaluable lessons about creating and adapting to their own future organizational changes.

In this article, I present and contrast two mental models that sponsors, planners, and implementers of transformative organizational change seem to use in forming and justifying their basic assumptions about the course and nature of the process of implementing the changes they intend to initiate. The first—the reasonable Phoenix mental model—is both common in use and simplistic. The second—the realistic resistance-management mental model—is both uncommon in use and complex. I describe the phases and characteristics of the realistic resistance-management mental model in some detail. However, because of limits in available space, I cannot present comprehensive details of the impact of each phase on an organization's boundary management functions, strategic directions, human resource management system, financial and other information management systems, delivery-chain or production processes, technology, structure, culture, emotional climate, leadership functions, decision making, or transactions among interdependent stakeholders. These details will have to wait for a future publication. In a later section, I describe a range of effective interventions that are appropriate for each phase.

Part 1: Mental Models of Organizational Transformation

Peter M. Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, and Kleiner (1994) defined mental models as

the images, assumptions, and stories which we carry in our minds of ourselves, other people, institutions, and every aspect of the world. . . . Human beings cannot navigate through the complex environments of our world without cognitive “mental maps”; and all of these mental maps, by definition, are flawed in some way. (p. 235)

The Reasonable Phoenix Mental Model

The dominant mental model of explaining the process of organizational change that I have seen in operation is simplistic. I have come to call this the reasonable Phoenix mental model (see Figure 1). Because it seems so reasonable, it is extremely compelling. It seems reasonable because it looks and sounds rationally logical and straightforward. It is compelling because it portrays organizational change, no matter how complex, as efficient. It is simplistic because it is not realistic; real life is much more messy.
Plans to implement discontinuous organizational transformations that are based on the reasonable Phoenix mental model simply do not work in reality as promised on the drawing board (or in the techspert's proposal).

I named the reasonable Phoenix mental model to reflect the myth of the beautiful bird rising from its own ashes, an extremely optimistic image. It is elegant in its simplicity and is a reasonable plan with many applications (e.g., to install new technology, solve problems, or capitalize on an improvement opportunity).

Those parts of the organization that are no longer considered useful or that will be replaced by the innovation are dismantled and removed. Usually, this is a gradual process that is expected to be completed in a matter of weeks or months. Simultaneously, the radical technological, structural, or business process innovation is gradually installed. Education for the need for the change and training in the use of the innovation occur in parallel with the dismantling and installation processes. The completion of the installation signals the "completion" of the change process. Everything seems to be accounted for. It seems to fit the situation. What could be more simple and clear cut?

**The Realistic Managed-Resistance Mental Model**

For more than 18 years, I have been refining the elements of a far more realistic model of radical organizational change and the organizational transformation process and what it takes to manage it. Many techspert and OD consultants I have educated, trained, partnered with, and managed tell me that they have been somewhat aware of many of the elements and aspects of this model, but they have been afraid to tell their prospective clients. They are afraid that their clients will reject their proposals if the proposals are too realistic. The consultants believe that organizational leaders do not want to hear about, invest scarce resources in, or deal with the complexities and difficulties of transforming their organizations. The frequently untested assumption is that they (the organizational leaders) do not want to hear about exigencies or contingencies. They want error-free linear plans. Consultants do not want to deal with the consequences of challenging the
assumptions of and disappointing organizational decision makers. This may be the basis of collusion that makes explicit and realistic consideration of implementation dynamics virtually undiscussable.

Chris Argyris (1990) put it this way:

Errors are produced and covered up on purpose as nonerrors in conformity with organizational defenses intended to prevent players from experiencing embarrassment or threat. But such a reason has to be hidden. To admit there is a need to cover up embarrassment or threat is itself embarrassing or threatening. Organizational defenses that protect the existing defensive defenses permit a lot of fancy footwork to occur when the issues are serious and threatening, precisely the conditions under which an organization needs some clear thinking. (pp. xiii–xiv)

In this article, I intend to make many undiscussable aspects of implementation explicit. As illustrated in Figure 2, there are four phases of my realistic managed-resistance mental model.

The model provides a practical road map to guide organizational leaders through unfamiliar territory filled with unprecedented and daunting challenges. The transformational journey entails both transitions and transformations. That is, one phase “transitions” into the next, and passing through all four phases constitutes a transformation.

**Preparatory Work**

The reasonable Phoenix mental model breaks down before its adherents believe it begins. Prior to the official public initiation of an organizational transformation, leaders and consultants convene for a period of time to study and diagnose the organization, identify issues, establish scope and target subsystems or processes, set and prioritize goals, estimate capital and resource constraints, and develop provisional plans. Many planners seem to assume that these activities will not affect organizational performance because they generally exclude operational people.
In effect, the transformative change process is initiated as soon as influential persons agree to meet to discuss the feasibility and desirability of self-consciously introducing some kind of discontinuous change in some aspect of the existing organization. Many leaders conveniently believe that these deliberations have no impact on current operational performance.

However, they forget or ignore the implications of the fact that corporate America has a favorite pastime. It is not baseball. It is executive-watching. When organizational members see their leaders breaking their typical routines, canceling prior commitments, and rushing around from one conference room to another with strangers (consultants), all know that something important is about to happen.

Rumors start making the rounds, and people cluster together and endlessly discuss the possibilities: in the corridors, cafeteria, rest rooms, and so forth. People become distracted and anxious; they imagine (fantasize about) the possible impact this "big new thing" might have on them. When they talk and fantasize more, they work less. Organizational performance declines. This unexpected drop in performance evokes considerable anxiety among key decision makers. In response, they often contact their subordinate managers requesting an explanation or demanding immediate improvement.

**Phase 1: Impact (Shock)**

The purposes and the plans for the transformational changes are made public. A process is initiated to dismantle those elements of the preexisting system that are seen as no longer useful. Many organizational leaders and members experience a profound sense of loss (Bowlby, 1980; Cohler & Stott, 1987; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Lerner & Lerner, 1987; Levy-Warren, 1987). They feel terrified, restless, and suspicious, and they engage in increased random (often counterproductive) activity. A parallel process is initiated to install new structures, processes, technologies, or philosophies. Relevant education or training programs are initiated, usually just before Phase 1 is initiated. Nevertheless, people who have responsibility for operating the newly changed organizational elements—or for operating within the changed organizational landscape—typically lack proficiency, mistrust themselves and their new equipment or processes, and feel intensely distressed. They use a variety of protective mechanisms to maintain their sense of control and their self-esteem. Organizational processes (Fink, Beaks, & Taddeo, 1971) such as decision making, goal setting, planning, interdepartmental relations, structures (including responsibilities, authority, and accountability), and role relationships are disrupted and deteriorate rapidly. Existing policies and procedures prove to be irrelevant. Performance drops.

Leaders, planners, implementers, consultants, and those stakeholders and constituents whose work lives are affected by the implementation or the results of the organizational changes have to cope with a variety of unprecedented individual and organizational dynamics. These parties are less effective if they discover and have to deal with these challenges on their own. Conversely, they are more effective when they know what to expect in advance and have access to competent third parties (i.e., process or OD consultants or OD-oriented line managers) to guide them through the challenges of this and subsequent phases. Thus, the level of effectiveness will generally be lower, and progress will be slower, in mismanaged or unmanaged organizational change.

**Phase 2: Defensive Retreat (Recoil and Turmoil)**

Dismantling and installation are completed. Transformational congestion and
compression gradually become evident. Organizational members struggle to master the installed organizational changes and to deal with unexpected work overload and stress. Organizational members are confused and disoriented. Measures of organizational effectiveness continue to decline. Customers complain about inadequate, "unresponsive" service. Leaders and planners are surprised, disappointed, frightened, and angry when expected step-step improvement does not occur. Leaders pressure managers and supervisors to use the completely installed organizational changes to improve organizational effectiveness.

Organizational Congestion and Compression

Congestion and compression phenomena overlap Phases 2 and 3. "Congestion" is a metaphor, similar to "gridlock"; I want to evoke an image of people who are struggling to comprehend and master what they experience as an overwhelming number and variety of unprecedented tasks, functions, and activities that are discontinuous with their past experiences, in addition to some familiar responsibilities such as continuing to deliver goods or services to fulfill their commitments to satisfy customers' requirements and preferences.

For the most part, the people already have the knowledge, skills, and experience to perform familiar responsibilities. Furthermore, well-established pathways or "pipelines" have evolved or have been designed to allow the work results of these familiar tasks, activities, and functions to flow as they are passed from internal supplier to internal customer along the organization's various value chains (also called supply or delivery chains). How much "work" (volume) can pass through these pipelines at any time is limited by the resources—the elements that compose the pipelines—that have been dedicated (e.g., time, personnel, equipment, material, budget, space, and the complexity or variety of the work).

Under "normal conditions," familiar work flows through the pipeline in a predictable, more or less reliable and even manner from internal suppliers to internal customers (see Figure 3). As a result of repeated experience, most of the ways in which the pipeline may become "jammed up" are well known, as are the procedures necessary to remove impediments or to break up obstructions. Specialized organizational members who are skilled in these "unjamming" functions (e.g., maintenance engineers) are kept available for corrective or preventive technical problem solving.

However, most people have not developed competence, confidence, and comfort (the 3 Cs, described in more detail later) in their unprecedented tasks, functions, and activities. Although some people may have received a certain amount of education and training, most are not yet proficient in performing their new, discontinuous responsibilities. They will be awkward and hesitant in their performance and, therefore, slow in applying what they may have learned. Mistakes will be made that add complexity and confusion, as well as increasing the time needed to perform many responsibilities. Fearing that they lack the requisite 3 Cs to perform their new work requirements at the necessary or expected level of proficiency, some people will conclude that to engage in this work is "suicidal," a prelude to personal disaster. They come to believe that they could lose their jobs on the basis of their manifest incompetence. Others may withhold contributing their maximum effort because they may feel that if they do perform the required new work, they will violate their organization's traditional practices and norms, cherished beliefs, and core assumptions.

Furthermore, political, economic, social, competitive, or legal forces in the external environment are likely to change, either gradually or radically. This will create de-
mands for the organization to shift its vision and mission (e.g., as leaders feel obliged to shift from a most likely case scenario to a worst case scenario or, alternatively, a best case scenario).

Congestion can be exacerbated by secondary organizational changes triggered by the secondary or parallel introduction of radical innovations (Beckhard & Harris, 1987, pp. 115–116). Examples are as follows:

1. Transactions between the organization and its significant stakeholders (located in relevant sectors of its external environment) may change in superficial or fundamental ways.

2. Organizational strategy and priorities may change (e.g., market vs. technology driven priorities or quality vs. price priorities).

3. Organizational structures may change (e.g., new information technology may enable steeply hierarchical organizations to de-layer and redesign themselves into lateral value chains composed of interdependent subsystems; changing market conditions may call for shifts from functional departments to regions or to business product units; computerized manufacturing or work redesign may lead to layering, outsourcing, and downsizing; or new management concepts may stimulate interest in semiautonomous, multifunctional, intrapreneural groups to replace functional or matrix organizations).

4. The way work is done may be redesigned (e.g., self-authorized suppliers planning deliveries through direct access to customers' inventory databases, Just-In-Time inventory and material management systems, virtual offices for individuals, or self-managed and self-directed work teams).

5. Personnel policies may change (e.g., rewarding creativity along with productivity, adding pay-for-knowledge policies, designing dual-career ladders, or adding team-based incentives) to support requisite behavioral changes.

6. Roles may change (e.g., more work by fewer people or forced job enlargement [enrichment]).

7. Interpersonal and intergroup relationships may change (e.g., stability and permanence may be replaced by a series of temporary relationships with a mix of new and old associates).
8. Organizational culture will certainly change. Prevailing beliefs, assumptions, norms, practices, and customs should (but may not) be reexamined, challenged, and modified; mismatches between espoused and evident values should (but may not) be revealed and corrected (or covered up).

Members of rapidly and constantly changing organizations can enhance their adaptiveness if they develop their previously unrecognized potentialities. Examples include personal qualities such as tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, talent for managing and making use of conflicts, willingness to take risks (courage to experiment rather than concentrate on avoiding mistakes), empathy, intuition, total systemic orientation, and a visionary, future-oriented perspective.

If they are to participate in creating—or adapting to—organizational changes, people must master a great many new, unprecedented competencies. This is complicated by a three-cornered dilemma (see Figure 4): People will have to figure out (a) which of their historic skill sets are no longer needed and must be discarded, (b) which of these skill sets have been and will continue to be useful and must be preserved, and, at the same time, (c) which totally new skill sets must be added (Freedman, 1992). Acquiring minimal levels of proficiency will be similar to painting a moving train. And, concurrent with all of this personal transformational change, people still have to fulfill their existing commitments to their internal and external customers.

I hope this description paints a vivid picture of a congested pipeline that is crowded by a much larger number and variety of responsibilities than the pipeline was designed to accommodate. Under conditions of congestion, the pace of work and production slows down (see Figure 5). People feel overloaded with both familiar and unfamiliar work. Stress, strain, and tension increase, and resilience and endurance decrease (Freedman, 1994). Customers are usually disappointed and frustrated. They complain to the organization's leaders and exert pressure on middle managers to fulfill their scheduled commitments. This adds to the congestion and the intensity of the stress.

Because the number and variety of concurrent changes and continuing responsibilities increase dramatically, with many new and old associates clamoring for attention and satisfaction of their needs, it is natural that people lose their orientation and perspective: They perceive their world as a "whirling blur" (Hansell, 1976). Their sense is that everything has to be done at once—everything has the highest priority—clearly an impossible job.

People shift their attention rapidly back and forth from one responsibility to another, working on an urgent task for a brief time until they are interrupted by another crisis and then dragged over to yet another activity, leaving a trail of unfinished business piling up and creating ripple effects in their wake. People feel they are being blown back and forth by external forces that are beyond their control.

I call this phenomenon compression because the experience reminds me of trying to walk through the concrete, steel, and glass canyons of Chicago on a windy day. The wind comes in off Lake Michigan at 25 miles per hour. It is compressed as it passes through the canyons between the 30- to 95-
story buildings, forcing it up to hurricane levels. Moving against the wind, progress is slow and requires tremendous concentration and expenditure of energy. Moving with the wind, progress is often too fast to allow attention to details and to keep one's feet; the probability of "accidents" increases dramatically. To both keep one's balance and get where one wants to go, whether moving with or against the wind, often requires the city administration to attach ropes to poles anchored along the sidewalks to provide pedestrians with additional support.

**Phase 3: Acknowledgment (Adjustment)**

Congestion and compression become most evident toward the end of Phase 2 and during the beginning of Phase 3. Work overload and stress, among all involved parties, increase. Middle managers and supervisors are likely to be encouraged by naive executives and project managers to use a "2 × 4" management style (i.e., "The only way to get those nonproductive people to produce is to hit them up around their heads, necks, and shoulders with a 2 × 4").

It probably feels safer to conservative (status-quo-oriented) organizational members when the sponsors of the organizational changes terminate the process (often prematurely) and return the organization to its old, familiar, comfortable state. Such decisions are extremely costly and are usually made by executives operating on the basis of an untested, unchallenged version of the Phoenix mental model. Executives perceive an enormous gap between the expected step improvement and the actual progress; they see that performance is close to rock bottom, and they imagine what their stakeholders (most often their stockholders and their board of directors) might say and do. As indicated in Figure 6, premature termination is a very real possibility; it is a choice that is made under duress and has been made with increasing frequency since the mid-1980s on both major and minor projects. For example, 70% of business process re-engineering initiatives and 70% of mergers and acquisitions were considered unsatisfactory; most have been spun off or divested during this time period.

Another phenomenon that frequently occurs in the midst of the work overload,
Organizations as Self-Organizing Systems

Emerging from the transformational congestion and compression phenomena that became most apparent during Phase 3 (and are apparent throughout Phase 4), measurable levels of organizational effectiveness steadily rise. Seemingly without assistance, these levels tend to peak, but months or years after the completed installation of the change (much later than planners or sponsors expected). Unassisted improvements usually reach levels that are higher than pretransformational baselines, but they rarely meet original expectations. How can this typical pattern be explained?

Frightened and angry managers who have used punitive measures to motivate "recalcitrant" employees attribute this improvement to their "2 by 4" management style. "See," they often say, "all it took was a little extra pain and pressure." This, however, is merely superstitious learning: Because improvement followed punishment, they assume that the punishment caused the improvement. (It is through such accidental and frequently incorrect conclusions [i.e., unsubstantiated local theories] that many organizational myths are created and become the basis for counterproductive managerial practices that become institutionalized as cultural norms.) I believe that unassisted improvement occurs in spite of the punishment.

Greater understanding of the dynamics of unassisted improvement can help executives, managers, workers, and their consultants to determine how they might actively facilitate the process and enhance the pace
and level of improvement. Work by M. Mitchell Waldrop (1987) in physics implies that, in attempting to satisfy their needs and fulfill their commitments as members of a complex system that is undergoing transformational changes, people unconsciously orient themselves to one another and organize themselves into an informal system through a myriad of individual transactions. This happens without anyone being in charge or consciously planning it. Rather, “groups of agents seeking mutual accommodation and self consistency somehow manage to transcend themselves [italics added], acquiring collective properties such as life, thought, and purpose that they might never have possessed individually” (Waldrop, 1987, p. 11).

In conditions of compression and congestion, individuals whose sense of identity and role in a relatively stable organization have destabilized often cling to their historic, specific role responsibilities. This provides them with a sense of coherence. However, the value of their contribution—and, hence, their meaning—depends on whether or not performing their traditional responsibilities actually satisfies the discontinuous demands created by the transformative change. Value of effort also depends on whether or not one person’s (or the person’s work unit’s) suppliers provide what is needed and whether customers appreciate and use the results of these efforts. Overloaded with work and operating under conditions of high stress and tension levels, with decreasing resilience and endurance, people tend to look for expedient means of doing an adequate job. Under fluid, ambiguous conditions, they establish whatever kinds of relationships they can with people who are available to provide some of the inputs they need to do their work. In the process, they may not realize they are neither obtaining nor incorporating all relevant information and tangible components or supplies they need to produce a high-quality piece of work. However, they are likely to judge the results of their efforts sufficient to get their piece of work out of their station and pass it on (by “tossing it over the fence”) to the next position in the supply chain so they can quickly refocus on yet another urgent task.

The preceding represents a “satisficing” strategy. That is, people feel satisfied because they let themselves feel they have completed one urgent piece or work. They feel their work is sufficient because they used all of the information and material resources that were close at hand. However, the work results are suboptimal because these individuals did not use all of the information and material resources that were available in the system; rather, they used only what they were able to access quickly and easily. The job they do is likely to be incomplete or of less than optimal quality and will not satisfy their customers in the long term.

However, once contact is made with and exchanges are transacted between interdependent suppliers and customers within the supply chain, a new connection is established. In the presence of uncertainty and ambiguity while working under tremendous pressure, coworkers create expedient patterns and practices that seem to generate useful results. And people tend to repeat their use of established connections that have proven helpful in the past. If applied repetitively with desirable consequences, these patterns and practices tend to become institutionalized, and they tend to persist or endure over time.

People create implicit hypotheses about what actions will lead to particular results (like the superstitious belief that “2 x 4” management is an effective way to deal with underperforming employees). The responses from their environment determine which hypotheses will appear to be useful and valid and lead to organizational rewards. People learn, not always accurately or comprehensively, even if they do not have all of the information they might want or need, while
their environment is changing in unexpected and dramatic ways.

"You muddle through, you adapt ideas, you copy, you try what worked in the past, you try out things" (Waldrop, 1987, p. 254). Without critical analysis, these expedient stop-gap measures are not recognized as such, but they become institutionalized as part of the organization's cultural norms. It follows that, without critical assistance, overall performance, measured over time, may rise because of the incessant tendency for people who are members of complex systems to self-organize, but not as fast as expected and not to the greatest extent possible.

**Phase 4: Adaptive Change (Reconstruction)**

There is a gradual improvement in individual performance, followed by improvements in work unit and intergroup performance. Employees gradually feel greater competence, confidence, and comfort (the 3 Cs). Many suboptimal adjustments and adaptations to changed conditions may become institutionalized as organizational traditions and norms, glorified and idealized in organizational myths and legends that guide members' thinking and actions for future transformations.

**Part 2: Facilitating (Managing) Transformational Change**

Transformational resistance, congestion, compression, work overload, stress, and tension cannot be avoided, but these phenomena can be managed. Third parties (process-oriented or OD consultants or experienced line managers) can learn to intervene so as to effectively and appropriately manage or facilitate the change (Hansell, 1976). Qualified consultants can model, train, coach, and counsel line managers until they are sufficiently proficient to function as effective third parties within their own organizations.

I believe there is adequate empirical evidence to claim that third parties can apply unique interventions that are specific for each of the four phases of the realistic managed-resistance mental model. There are also useful interventions that are common to all phases, some of which third parties should be capable of making available on an as-needed basis. Properly applied, the elements of this portfolio of interventions will enhance the probability of achieving a number of anticipated benefits and avoiding a number of predictable losses (see Figure 7).

**Phase-Specific Third-Party Interventions**

My intent, in using the term third party, is to express my belief that the interventions described should ultimately be performed by line managers. However, until line managers are enabled to become fully competent, confident (in the predictive power of the model, the effectiveness of the relevant interventions, and their own ability to apply the model and interventions), and comfortable (the 3 Cs), the interventions—and the process of enabling line managers—will be the responsibility of internal or external consultants.

**Pretransformational Education**

Transformational plans should be based on (a) a comprehensive analysis of the potential consequences (expressed in advantages and disadvantages) of each available option (e.g., information technology-driven change, quality-driven change, or no change) and (b) a realistic understanding of the transformational process as it typically unfolds in complex systems. It follows that several educational interventions should precede even the planning of transformational changes. In my experience, the most significant educational event is one that challenges key decision makers' implicit
reasonable Phoenix) mental model and reveals it as nothing more than an attractive illusion. They have to understand that the reasonable Phoenix mental model is not realistic. Leaders must adopt realistic mental models of transformational change, specifically this realistic managed-resistance mental model. They must also test the model until they feel confident enough to use it as their guide for anticipating and planning to cope with the difficult but predictable downstream consequences of restructuring their organization, computerizing their information, redesigning their core business processes, or reconfiguring their workforce.

Leaders must fully comprehend that an organizational change that initially looks like a relatively simple and straightforward transition is likely to precipitate a full-blown but unanticipated transformation. This requires them to master the basic principles of sociotechnical systems and complex systems theories. These core conceptual competencies will enable them to anticipate how, in organizations that are composed of tightly coupled or interdependent subsystems, a small upstream change will trigger, through a domino or ripple effect, a cascade of downstream perturbations that follow the work flow pipeline and ultimately spread.

Leaders must acquire a working knowledge of the political, social, and economic implications of transformational change. This includes a working knowledge in terms of recognizing, understanding, and managing resistance to transformative sociotechnical change. With a comprehensive, reliable conceptual base, organizational leaders, planners, sponsors, and implementers are more likely to anticipate and act appropriately, effectively, and in a timely manner during each of the four phases described.

**Phase 1: Shock (Impact)**

The purposes of third-party interventions in this phase are to (a) enable individuals and intact work groups to maintain their own boundaries (defend their limits if necessary), (b) prevent unnecessary work overload and stress, (c) limit emotional contami-
nation and preserve the functional sub-systems, and (d) induce at least the perception of trust among work unit members and between these individuals and their internal or external suppliers and customers, as well as representatives of the larger organization.

The specific activities of Phase 1 are as follows: (a) regulate the onset and sequence of organizational changes to minimize work overload and congestion and (b) regulate the emotional responses of those affected (validate feelings). It is important to note that emotional responses of involved or affected parties during this phase are quite convertible. That is, if they receive messages indicating that their feelings are abnormal and unacceptable, they are likely to judge their emotional responses to be "crazy." They are also likely to generate various feelings about the way they are feeling (epiphenomena). For example, they may feel angry with themselves for feeling fearful. Thus, it is vital that people get the message that their feelings are normal responses to, what for them, are "crazy" situations or conditions.

The attitude adopted by the third party is critical. To optimize their effectiveness, third parties must be passively responsive, friendly, and receptive and open. Also, they must avoid making jokes: This is serious business. (On the other hand, it is also essential for all involved parties to appreciate the essential absurdity of human existence.)

**Phase 2: Defensive Retreat (Recoil and Turmoil)**

The purpose of third-party interventions in this phase is to direct the anger experienced by the involved or affected parties toward functional, instrumental activities and away from self-destructive activities. The specific activities of Phase 2 are as follows: (a) convene all persons who are involved in or affected by the "crisis" that has been precipitated by the organizational transformational initiative; (b) regulate focus on identifying crisis-related issues; (c) prevent diversions, avoidance, or denial; and (d) confront inappropriate behavior as required. The attitude adopted by the third party should be characterized by certainty, gentle firmness, and persistence and patience.

**Phase 3: Acknowledgment (Adjustment)**

The purpose of third-party interventions in this phase is to induce self-discipline, responsibility for and to oneself, and interdependency with others. The specific activities of Phase 3 are to (a) recollect images of lost attachments to be regained, (b) prevent precipitous action, (c) regulate self-esteem and dignity, (d) reinforce persistence in the search for alternative possibilities, (e) facilitate exploration of costs and benefits, and (f) push, prod, and test reality. The attitude adopted by the third party should be characterized by reassurance, maintenance of high but achievable expectations, and a lack of sympathy (sympathy will precipitate a return to "defensive retreat").

**Phase 4: Adaptive Change (Reconstruction)**

The purposes of third-party interventions in this phase are to reinforce (lock in) functional achievements and prevent complacency. The specific activities of Phase 4 are as follows: (a) maintain vigil and support, (b) provide problem-solving processes, (c) cross check emerging outcomes against desired states, (d) regulate relaxation and celebrate achievements, (e) encourage the search for new challenges, and (f) ensure retention of explicit learnings. The attitude adopted by the third party should be characterized by active friendliness, congratulatory approval, and humility; do not seek or encourage others' approval (or their dependence on you).
Mechanisms Useful Throughout the Transformational Process

Acquisition of Competence, Confidence, and Comfort (the 3 Cs)

Leaders, managers, and workers will require proficiency in the application of such essential methodological competencies as managing projects, managing several types of small and large meetings (i.e., meetings that focus on progress review, fact finding, confrontations, information dissemination and collection, visioning, decision making, issue identification, and identifying and solving problems), creating and using multiple channels and modes of communicating to organizational stakeholders and members, managing and using conflicts, resolving disputes, and building consensus among a critical mass of significant, influential parties affected by a change. Leaders must accept the fact that many core process skills cannot be mastered before a transformational change is initiated; there is too much to learn all at once. Also, engaging all relevant parties in a heavily front-end-loaded training process creates its own secondary stream of work overload and stress.

As an alternative, the involved and affected parties must have access to learning opportunities as they discover they need to add new competencies to their existing skill sets. These discoveries usually occur during the transformation, as people encounter unprecedented events or discontinuous conditions that demand new responses, strategies, and tactics. The typical organizational response to any performance discrepancy is to provide training programs to those who seem to be in need. However, more and more organizations are discovering that formal training programs, by themselves, cannot ensure behavior change on the job. Trainees have to be followed from the classroom to the workplace, where they must be provided with appropriate modeling, mentoring, and coaching to help them lock in and apply what they learned in training. Most important, workplace cultural norms, practices, and core assumptions may require indirect modification to allow people to apply the competencies they acquired in the classroom.

This incremental competence acquisition process is a key element of my “just-in-time” training strategy. It requires considerable resources, good judgment, flexibility, and broad competence on the part of leaders who recognize the need to make adequate resources available to provide learning opportunities as needed.

Furthermore, the involved parties must not be delayed unnecessarily in training programs from returning to their transformational and routine duties. This requires that the consultant-trainers design learning opportunities according to my “just enough” training strategy. That is, learners should be provided with just enough competence-based training and education to enable them to deal with the specific issues with which they are currently confronted. Providers of training must refrain from exploiting learning opportunities to display everything they believe is—or soon will be—relevant for the parties involved in the transformational initiative.

Dealing With Work Overload and Stress

Jay Galbraith (1978) provided some specific suggestions for reducing work overload and stress. His concept of task uncertainty refers to the dynamic unpredictability of events. When fundamental transformative changes are initiated in a large, complex organization, the number of exceptional events and unpredicted difficulties is exponentially higher than when the same organization operated under familiar pre-transformational conditions.

As the magnitude and complexity of transformative changes increase, task uncertainty will also increase: specifically, the
uncertainty of assigning priorities among—and methods for dealing with—exceptional side effects. Simultaneously, the number and variety of essential tasks, activities, and functions that must be performed cooperatively by different yet interdependent work units within a fleeting, narrowing window of opportunity also increase. Task uncertainty makes it essential to enable interdependent work units to communicate effectively, cooperate with one another, and become flexible enough to organize and reorganize themselves into different configurations that enable them to assist one another.

Organizational leaders also have critical strategic choices to make. Shall they approach the transformational process using a lean and mean philosophy, trying to negotiate the unfamiliar terrain and its hazards with the same minimal resources they expect they will need in the posttransformational environment? That is, shall they adopt the philosophy of driving or pushing the transformational initiative from behind with ambitious schedules and demands? Or shall they adopt a supportive or pulling strategy by providing the resources that seem to be needed during the transformation while expecting that a decreasing amount and variety of temporary resources will be required as permanent organizational members master the functions they will have to perform during the post-installation processes of diffusion and assimilation of the transformation?

**What, Specifically, Would a Supportive–Pulling Strategy Look Like?**

According to Roger Harrison (1981), organizational leaders and members can manage increased task uncertainty—and, I believe, transformational congestion and compression as well—through a four-pronged strategy: (a) Obtain additional resources on a temporary basis; (b) segment the transformation into a series of stand-alone transitions; (c) reduce the system's need for information processing; and (d) increase the system's capacity to process information. Some elaboration is in order.

**Additional Resources**

The greater the task uncertainty, the longer it is likely to take to enable the transforming organization to learn how to work effectively. Thus, it is vital to provide the organizational system with additional (slack) resources: time, money, equipment, materials, information, knowledge, skills, and qualified people. Additional resources will be needed in (a) temporary, parallel transformation project teams (described later) and (b) the permanent host organization during the transformational process. Four primary resources will make the greatest difference.

**Human resources.** Transformational change efforts should be overstuffed with a rich mix of additional techsperts, OD, and human resource management specialists. Also, full-time permanent employees should be prepared to work overtime. When a transformation project team is created, members of the permanent system will be recruited to serve on a full-time basis (for the duration of the project team or on a time-limited basis). These people may or may not be released from some or all of their routine responsibilities. Their removal from the permanent system creates "holes" in routine operations that must be filled. If routine responsibilities cannot be delegated to qualified coworkers, temporary contractors will have to be recruited, oriented, and assimilated. If, for any reason, this is not possible, employees on the transformation project and in the permanent system will have to work evenings and weekends to keep goods and services flowing. The organization should be prepared to reward them accordingly.

At times, full-time temporary techsperts
may be hired to perform highly specialized, one-time-only functions that the permanent posttransformational organization will not need to master or to help work off the backlog of work in process. They may also serve as mentors to full-time permanent personnel. These techsperts should be terminated when they have performed the required one-time-only functions or when full-time permanent personnel complete the climb up their respective learning curves and master the competencies they need to be self-reliant.

**Material resources.** Adequate material resources should be made available to ensure that the system can cope with certain contingencies with moderate- to high-level probabilities. Redundant systems and equipment, extra spare parts, and replacement units for critical equipment should be stockpiled to ensure against the risk of costly, time-consuming equipment breakdowns or additional workflow bottlenecks. Considering everything that can go wrong, it is unacceptable for a transformational effort to be derailed because team members, as a result of shortages, lack the material resources to fulfill their commitments. Most organizations have better things to do with their funds than to suffer the consequences of purchasing cheap material resources.

**Money.** Adequate financial resources must be made available.

Observance of stringent budgets should be seen as a “target” to be aimed at rather than a fixed limit to which transformational initiatives must rigidly adhere. There has to be a realistic amount of flexibility in the budgetary process.

In anticipation that unforeseen problems will occur, effective, acceptable mechanisms must be established for (a) quickly reviewing the need for additional budgetary line items or funds, (b) quickly modifying the budget, and (c) obtaining and disbursing additional funds so that critical equipment, materials, personnel, consultative expertise, and managerial resources can be quickly specified, ordered, delivered, and deployed.

**Time.** If all else fails, the transformation will simply take longer than expected. Schedules will slip. Projected milestones that prove to have been overly ambitious have to be renegotiated with relevant stakeholders (especially customers and owners) and pushed back. Time is the resource of last resort, and it requires the least planning and creativity to make available.

As illustrated in Figure 8, when the necessary and sufficient additional resources are made available and properly applied, the “pipeline” can expand. Thus, more and more varied responsibilities can be performed within the same time frame. Transformational congestion can be relieved to a great extent. Transformational tasks, activities, and functions—most of which will not be required in the posttransformational state—will be performed (usually by full- or part-time temporary contract employees) with minimal competition with or disruption of routine business activities.

**The Transformational Process as a Series of Stand-Alone Transitions**

It may be practical to break up a complex transformation into component transitional phases, each separated by a “breathing space” (e.g., 2 weeks to a month). This would allow people to assimilate the changes installed to date, reflect on what they have learned, and revitalize their resilience and endurance levels. Each transition would have its own distinct set of goals. These goals can be represented as major milestones. The achievement of each milestone can be designed to add some incremental but observable intrinsic value to the organization’s operational capabilities. Each phase should be able to stand alone, independent of but building on preceding phases and setting more of the foundation for future phases.
**Conservative Use of Scarce Resources**

As a consequence of cumulative experience with the transformational effort, involved and affected parties are likely to see that the same resources will be used repeatedly, during each component transition. They will see that they do not have to finance huge costs for many different resources that will be required throughout the total transformation. This will appeal to those very conservative and frugal critics who concern themselves primarily with a single—legitimate but narrow—aspect of their organization’s health: its financial condition.

Actually, this is something of a harmless subterfuge. In all probability, expenditures for essential resources will remain very much the same, regardless of the way in which the transformation is conceptualized and managed. Perhaps, however, people can better understand and accept—or tolerate—such costs when the transformation is presented as a series of segmented transitions.

However, this strategy is vulnerable: Organizational leaders may still pull the plug on the transformation or on any of its component transitions if, at any time, they are displeased with the nature or pace of progress. Coordinating teams and implementation personnel could be replaced once a milestone is achieved or if a deadline is missed. Such terminations would result in a loss of continuity and momentum. The value of cumulative lessons learned may be lost if replacement personnel took over a transformation-in-progress as if nothing had been achieved by anyone else before they came aboard. Nevertheless, even if executives do pull the plug once a component transition has been completed, at least the work completed to date may be preserved.

Segmenting a transformation involves a second significant risk: the redistribution of power. The tolerance thresholds of influential persons may gradually be approached and eventually exceeded as their vested interests are increasingly threatened by cumulative organizational changes. This occurs more often than one might imagine. Well-established, influential people may oppose the planned transformation for any number of reasons. However, they may be unwilling to express their disapproval. This choice may be political, particularly if senior executives publicly endorse the transformation. Secretly, antagonists resist by biding their time, hoping that the executive sponsors will tire of the process or of the mounting costs and then terminate the transfor-
mational effort. That would enable them to avoid making their opposition explicit and visible. (In this way, they may hope to protect themselves in case their covert opposition fails.) To unobtrusively push their executives in their own preferred direction, such persons often raise critical, skeptical questions. They rarely take the risk of making declarative oppositional statements or adopting a visible, explicitly contrary position like one that a self-confident member of the "loyal opposition" might take.

Without preemptive executive action or some major implementation disaster, secret antagonists will silently and unobtrusively withhold their support to undermine the transformational initiative. If there is a disaster, these people will probably welcome the opportunity to overreact and assume the role of the outraged or betrayed former-supporters of the transformational effort.

These same risks exist with any transformational strategy. They are somewhat less likely when decision makers explicitly address the issue of power redistribution. This can be easier by segmenting a transformation into component transitions, which may contain power shifts within manageable boundaries.

**Reduced Need for Information Processing**

Many people prematurely assume that the transformative process is complete when all appropriate elements of the pretransformational system have been dismantled and the new elements have been installed and deployed. They may believe that they have climbed to the top of their learning curve once they have mastered and begun to make their own individual contributions to a value-adding business process. However, integration of all of the parts and the diffusion, assimilation, and mastery of the structural, process, or technological innovation by the entire system—all along the organization’s supply, delivery, or value chain—is much more complex.

**Supply, Delivery, or Value Chain**

It is essential to facilitate the diffusion or dissemination of radical innovations throughout the organizational system and the assimilation and mastery of these innovations by those who must learn how to function within new structures, operate new technologies, or facilitate new processes. The new ways of working spread throughout the organization by flowing through the same pathways and pipelines that have been established by the organization’s existing supply, delivery, or value chains. Thus, each interdependent work unit will progressively discover its own unique difficulties and challenges while trying to add value to the transformative process and produce deliverable results.

The major source of difficulties will be exchange transactions (from supplier to customer) at the boundaries between the various interdependent work units. To ensure the effectiveness of the process of passing work in progress along the delivery chain from internal suppliers to internal customers, at least some unit members will have to become proficient in performing boundary-spanning management functions.

**Install Temporary Buffers**

If the interdependency between parts of an organization is reduced by temporarily converting tightly coupled units into loosely coupled units, the need for processing information between them would also reduce. Leaders can create a buffer function between any configuration of interdependent work units or subsystems. This can be only a temporary expediency. Such buffers reduce the need for complex, time-consuming involvement of multiple work units in decision-making processes. This may result in inferior decisions for some period. But
buffers are practical if the organization's business processes can accommodate the temporary need for otherwise interdependent work units to function autonomously.

The buffer function can be created by assigning people to perform various boundary management activities to facilitate supplier-customer transactions between interdependent units of the same delivery chain. Boundary managers have the following responsibilities: (a) Discover and explain the customers' requirements (e.g., drop-dead delivery dates, support services like maintenance that customers will need) and their preferences (e.g., type of packaging) to suppliers in language that the suppliers understand, (b) discover and explain the suppliers' needs for particular information (e.g., the intended use of the product, standards and specifications) to the customer in language that the customer understands, (c) explain the nature and sources of any customer's dissatisfaction with the service being received to suppliers in an understandable and nonaggressive manner, and (d) mediate mutually acceptable resolutions of any misunderstandings and renegotiate such elements of the working contract as delivery dates and service agreements.

Buffers must be understood, by all involved parties, as representing stop-gap measures. The boundary manager role may be filled through temporary full- or part-time assignments. Persons filling this role must know (or be capable of quickly learning) the local "languages" and cultures of all involved. These assignments must be supported by senior management until the full-time permanent members of the involved work units master and take over this unique set of interunit boundary management responsibilities.

**Increases in Information-Processing Capacity**

An effective communications system enables all involved or affected parties to convert raw data into useful information and then exchange, process, and make practical use of that information. An organization cannot use the same communications system in its posttransformational era as it did in its pretransformational era. Transforming organizations require nonconventional communications mechanisms and unprecedented information-processing capabilities that are radically different, in substance and in quality, from those required in the past and those needed in the future.

A temporary, parallel transformational coordinating system can be a useful but disposable temporary mechanism or platform through which essential information is effectively transmitted from its sources to its destinations. Such a system also can ensure that essential but temporary responsibilities are performed or facilitated during the transformational process. The system can provide a measure of protection for the permanent organization against excessive ambiguity, overload, and stress during this critical period.

A complete sample format that describes an ideal temporary, parallel system may illuminate some basic concepts and alternative structures. I believe that an ideal temporary, parallel system consists of five groups (see Figure 9): (a) the transition coordinating team, (b) a steering committee, (c) an advisory committee, (d) a council of

![Figure 9. Elements of a temporary parallel transformation coordinating system. (Copyright © 1988 by Arthur M. Freedman. Reprinted with permission.)](image-url)
managers and supervisors, and (e) several task forces or special assignment teams. Depending on the magnitude or complexity of an intended organizational change, a complete temporary parallel organization may be required. When needed, each of the components have to be designed, staffed, and chartered (authorized). Startup should be facilitated, and resources and management will be required for the duration of the transformational process.

Participation in any of the structures and activities described subsequently should be considered to be a legitimate part of organizational members' work responsibilities. All members of the permanent organization who are assigned to the temporary parallel system must be oriented to playing the role of "representatives" of their permanent, back-home subsystem (Freedman, 1987).

Transformation coordinating team (TCT). A temporary communication and coordination system would operate parallel to and in support of the permanent but transformation line organization. The option of establishing a full-time, temporary TCT staff must be considered. The TCT can relieve line management of many unfamiliar, one-time-only responsibilities. TCT members should serve as expediters but not as decision makers or implementers. They must serve under the direction of and be accountable to the organization's permanent line management. Permanent line managers should always retain final authority and ultimate responsibility. The TCT must not become a substitute for line management. Sooner rather than later, the functions that are temporarily performed by the TCT must be assumed and performed by line management. TCTs may be composed of internal and external techsperts, transformational (OD) specialists, and a respected line manager in the prominent senior TCT position. I describe the remaining types of teams only briefly.

Problem-solving teams (PSTs). PSTs or task forces are chartered to further reduce the temporary overload on line management. PSTs can be strategically located to continuously scan the entire supply chain and identify and differentiate among the three classes of critical issues. PSTs report to line management, possibly through the TCT.

Each PST should have a specific mission to study and should recommend or enact decisions for dealing with specific issues as they emerge. Thus, they take a significant amount of detail work off of the desks of organizational leaders, leaving them free to perform the coordination and support functions that the transforming organization needs.

Steering committee (SC). The SC provides direction for the transformation and serves as the primary link between the permanent and the temporary parallel organizations. As such, the SC must function like a magnet, attracting information from all parts and levels of the organization that is relevant for steering the transition. It must also ensure that all involved parties and subsystems maintain commitment to achieving the desired state. It must ensure that the organization is on course as it makes the transition from the previously existing state and evolves into the desired state.

Advisory council (AC). The primary purposes of the AC are to serve as (a) a sounding board for the ideas of the SC or the TCT and (b) one of several formal vehicles through which any individual member of the organization, regardless of level, can make opinions, concerns, doubts, reservations, and recommendations known to the SC or the TCT. The AC should include representatives of all of the organization's major departments and staff groups; these individuals should have integrity and should be loyal and dedicated both to their respective organizational subsystems and to the future of their organization. They should expect to act in a political manner but with unquestionable integrity.

Council of managers and supervisors (CMS). Organizations can create opportu-
nities for managers and supervisors to convene on a regular schedule (e.g., 1 day per month). Without such structured events, managers and supervisors are often forgotten and operate in a virtual vacuum without reliable peer contact and opportunities to discuss the trials and tribulations of operating within the pressurized spaces between workers, senior management, suppliers, and customers (Oshry, 1986, 1995).

CMSs give their members a relatively safe opportunity to identify, discuss, and analyze the personal, professional, and organizational issues with which they are confronted, particularly those caused, exacerbated, or illuminated by the transformational process. They can consider, discuss, and agree to recommend strategies to deal with identified common issues. CMSs can also serve as a sounding board or reality (or sanity) check, reviewing and responding to initiatives that may be recommended by PSTs or the SC and providing essential feedback about or new perspectives for such ideas. Furthermore, CMS members can serve as reliable channels of timely, valid information to the rank and file about transition progress, achievements, and emerging implementation issues. They can then collect and feed their subordinates’ reactions back to the SC through the CMS. Finally, CMS meetings can be used for educational and training programs for managers and supervisors.

Process analysis. Frequent formal process analysis sessions (Freedman, 1989) should be conducted during and at the conclusion of all team meetings. The purposes are (a) to examine and learn from previous experiences and enable teams to continuously improve their effectiveness and (b) to organize, archive, and disseminate the individual and collective lessons that all involved parties may cull from their shared experience in the organizational transformation process.

These lessons must be collected, collated, and made easily available to the permanent line managers to assist them in raising their own learning curves. Ultimately, line management must master and incorporate the responsibilities that the temporary parallel organization should perform during the transformational process.

Interventions Likely to Be Useful on Various Occasions

Role relationships among individuals, teams, and subsystems—or between an organization and its various stakeholders and constituents—rarely remain static or unfold as planned or expected, particularly in the near-chaotic conditions of an organizational transformation. Roles generally evolve incrementally. However, as a consequence of an organizational transformation, roles often change in a rapid, dramatic fashion, expanding, contracting, or shifting. As their roles change, parties to any work relationship also have to change in terms of the nature and quality of existing relationships (or in the context of entirely new relationships with new, unknown parties). Two highly useful microprocesses can help people maintain a functional level of stability and predictability in uncertain times. One, Harrison’s role negotiation model, was mentioned earlier.

A second model—the pinch model—describes how work relationships are established and how interdependent parties can manage their relationships so that work gets done during times of change. Sherwood and Glidewell (1973) described a process that enables related parties to stay out of trouble rather than simply get out of trouble. The process enables involved parties to clarify the uncertainties of their relationships and to develop future options for themselves. This and Harrison’s processes should become permanent elements in the normative structure (i.e., the culture) of an organization. The pinch model is a practical theoretical model that guides involved parties through a series of steps as they clarify and
renegotiate productive and satisfying work relationships.

In Conclusion: A Dilemma and a Word of Caution

Many of the facilitative strategies recommended here are prescriptive. They accommodate organizational leaders who insist that their consultants earn credibility by providing viable answers to questions such as the following: "OK, so you have described the transformational issues that are likely to emerge; now tell me what you think we can do about them?"

Organizational leaders and members should make informed selections from the options I have presented. These options may be taken to be either prescriptive or simply illustrative. I believe that the most viable alternatives—those that would be both effective and supported—will be generated by organizational leaders and members through a participative application of the action research method. Through proficiency in applying this method, people enable themselves to search for and discover—or to create—innovative methods to cope with any number of unique, challenging organizational issues.

A word of caution: Although it is complex, the realistic managed-resistance mental model appears to be rather too neat. Consider just how messy real life can be: Imagine that when you are halfway through Phase 2 of a total quality management initiative, a reengineering project begins to flow through your organization. Now you are dealing with a higher level of complexity: You are trying to master two unprecedented innovations at the same time you are trying to perform your routine business responsibilities. Then, just as you begin to figure out how to juggle two bowling balls and a basketball, along comes an urgent downsizing initiative. So there you are, trying to meet your commitments to your customers while you are learning how to manage elements of your delivery chain (and reengineer some of the business processes that lie at the core of that value chain) at the same time you are helping to determine where to downsize and how to redefine the roles of survivors so that essential work does not fall through the cracks. As if that is not enough to send you screaming to your psychotherapist, your major customer calls to inform you that they have changed their specifications on that order that your people have busted their butts to get 85% complete. Now you will have to tear the project down, redesign it, and recycle back to the 30% completion level, but your customer refuses to permit you to push back the schedule and change the delivery date. Are you having fun yet?

References


