RETHINKING RESISTANCE AND RECOGNIZING AMBIVALENCE: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL VIEW OF ATTITUDES TOWARD AN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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In this article I review studies of resistance to change and advocate new research based on a reconceptualization of individual responses to change as multidimensional attitudes. A challenging question for research and practice arises: How can we balance the organizational need to foster ambivalent attitudes toward change and the individual need to minimize the potentially debilitating effects of ambivalence? I conclude by highlighting the importance of examining the evolution of employee responses to change over time and the need to understand responses to change proposals that emerge from bottom-up, egalitarian change processes.

Adapting to changing goals and demands has been a timeless challenge for organizations, but the task seems to have become even more crucial in the past decade. In the for-profit sector, global population growth and political shifts have opened new markets for products and services at a dizzying pace. To respond to the pace of change, organizations are adopting flatter, more agile structures and more empowering, team-oriented cultures. As status differences erode, some employees are coming to expect involvement in decisions about organizational change. Successful organizational adaptation is increasingly reliant on generating employee support and enthusiasm for proposed changes, rather than merely overcoming resistance.

The concept of resistance to change has been widely studied, but it has limitations. Both Merron (1993) and Dent and Goldberg (1999) have argued for retiring the phrase "resistance to change." The limitations of the concept can be framed in philosophical terms; for instance, critical theorists and labor policy scholars argue that the interests of managers should not be privileged over the interests of workers when studying organizational change (Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994). Alternatively, the limitations of the concept can be framed in practical

terms; for instance, practical scholars and scholarly practitioners argue that the concept might have outlived its usefulness (Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Krantz, 1999). My purpose here is to summarize a critique of existing views of resistance to change and to advocate a view that captures more of the complexity of individuals' responses to proposed organizational changes.

In the first part of the article, I suggest that in studies of resistance to change, researchers have largely overlooked the potentially positive intentions that may motivate negative responses to change. I also show how studies of resistance have dichotomized responses to change and, thus, somewhat oversimplified them. Furthermore, I argue that varied emphases in the conceptualization of resistance have slipped into the literature, blurring our sense of the complexities of the phenomenon.

In the second part of the article, I propose a multidimensional view of responses to proposed organizational changes, capturing employee responses along at least three dimensions (emotional, cognitive, and intentional). Within this view, "resistance to a change" is represented by the set of responses to change that are negative along all three dimensions, and "support for a change" is represented by the set of responses that are positive along all three dimensions. Responses to a change initiative that are neither consistently negative nor consistently positive, which were previously ignored but are potentially the most prevalent type of initial response,

can be analyzed as cross-dimension ambivalence in employees' responses to change.

In the third part of the article, I identify the implications of this new view for both research and practice. By highlighting the many other sets of responses that can occur, this new view shows the importance of ambivalent responses to change for research on exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect and for research on generating change within organizations.

A SYNTHESIS OF PAST CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Unfavorable Responses to Change Might Be Motivated by the Best of Intentions

In the majority of work on resistance to change, researchers have borrowed a view from physics to metaphorically define resistance as a restraining force moving in the direction of maintaining the status quo (cf. Lewin, 1952). Furthermore, most scholars have focused on the various "forces" that lead employees away from supporting changes proposed by managers. As Watson (1982) points out, managers often perceive resistance negatively, since they see employees who resist as disobedient. And as Jermier et al. put it, "The most prevalent way of analysing resistance is to see it as a reactive process where agents embedded in power relations actively oppose initiatives by other agents" (1994: 9). Even if they only see employees who oppose change as short sighted, managers are tempted by the language of resistance to treat their subordinates as obstacles.

Thus, the label of resistance can be used to dismiss potentially valid employee concerns about proposed changes. Of course, for a long time in the practical literature about managing change processes, researchers have been advising practitioners to guard against this. For example, Mary Parker Follett pointed out in the 1920s that

> we shouldn't put to ... workers finished plans in order merely to get their consent.... one of two things is likely to happen, both bad: either we shall get a rubber-stamped consent and thus lose what they might contribute to the problem in question, or else we shall find ourselves with a fight on our hands—an open fight or discontent seething underneath (reprinted in Graham, 1995: 220).

Likewise, Lawrence (1954) warns managers to avoid creating resistance in subordinates by assuming that they will always be opposed to change. In the 1990s others have reissued similar warnings (Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Merron, 1993). A prominent consultant noted that the concept of resistance to change "has been transformed over the years into a not-so-disguised way of blaming the less powerful for unsatisfactory results of change efforts" (Krantz, 1999: 42).

This tendency to dismiss employees' objections to change simply may be another manifestation of the fundamental attribution error (Jones & Harris, 1967); that is, managers in charge of rolling out a change initiative blame others for the failure of the initiative, rather than accepting their role in its failure. Employees are likely to do the same thing—assigning blame for failed change attempts to their managers, rather than themselves. However, as Klein (1976) and Thomas (1989) argue, in most research on resistance to change, researchers have taken the perspective of those in charge of implementing change, and so scholars have written less about the perspectives of those with less power. Perhaps scholars, as well as practitioners, need to be cautioned against playing the blame game unwittingly.

Fortunately, in other types of literature—not yet well integrated into research on resistance to change—scholars also remind us of a wider range of reasons why employees may oppose a proposed organizational change. For instance, research on obedience to authority indicates that resistance might be motivated by individuals' desires to act in accordance with their ethical principles (Milgram, 1965; Modigliani & Rochat, 1995). Similarly, the organizational dissent literature shows that some employee resistance to organizational actions is motivated by more than mere selfishness (Graham, 1984, 1986). Also, recent studies of issue selling (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton, 1998; Dutton, Ashford, Wierba, O'Neill, & Hayes, 1997) indicate that employees might try to get top management to pay attention to issues that employees believe must be addressed in order for the organization to maintain high performance.

Rarely do individuals form resistant attitudes, or express such attitudes in acts of dissent or protest, without considering the potential negative consequences for themselves. This point is documented in several studies. In the field of

ethics, for instance, Clinard (1983) documents the "pressures on middle management," such as threats to their opportunities for advancement or to their job security, that can discourage managers from speaking up about ethical concerns. Meyerson and Scully (1995) dramatize the dilemmas faced by change agents when judging how far they can stretch those they wish to lead. Rodrigues and Collinson (1995) analyze the different ways in which Brazilian employees use humor to "camouflage and express their dissent" (1995: 740), as well as the times when camouflage was powerful (and the conditions under which more acerbic satire was used). Thus, frivolous expression of resistance seems unlikely, since individuals who engage in it could face severe penalties and are aware that they should tread lightly.

Hence, what some may perceive as disrespectful or unfounded opposition might also be motivated by individuals' ethical principles or by their desire to protect the organization's best interests. It is worth entertaining efforts to take those good intentions more seriously by downplaying the invalidating aspect of labeling responses to change "resistant."

Varying Emphases in the Conceptualization of Resistance

Studies of resistance would also benefit from careful attention to the concept's meaning. As Davidson argues, resistance has come to include

> anything and everything that workers do which managers do not want them to do, and that workers do not do that managers wish them to do. . . . resort to such an essentially residual category of analysis can easily obscure a multiplicity of different actions and meanings that merit more precise analysis in their own right (1994: 94).

A review of past empirical research reveals three different emphases in conceptualizations of resistance: as a cognitive state, as an emotional state, and as a behavior. Although these conceptualizations overlap somewhat, they diverge in important ways. Finding a way to bring together these varying emphases should deepen our understanding of how employees respond to proposed organizational changes.

Portraying resistance in terms of behavior has been common since the earliest work on the topic. In his early theorizing, Lewin (1952) de-

fined resistance by using a metaphor from the physical sciences. In their classic study Coch and French (1948) focused on the undesirable behaviors of workers in response to management-imposed changes in jobs and work methods. With their quasi-experiment they examined whether encouraging employee participation in planning a change would reduce resistance. Although their conceptual discussion indicated that resistance could involve undesirable behaviors and/or aggression, their measures focused on neither. Instead, the criterion they used to compare the treatment and control groups was desirable behavior, in the form of compliance with the production rate standards set by management. (While strict compliance with the rate standards may or may not have been accompanied by undesirable behaviors or aggression, this possibility could not have been captured in the measures reported.) This study generated a large body of work on the effects of participative decision making (see McCaffrey, Faerman, & Hart, 1995, for a recent review).

More recent studies of resistance also have focused on behavior. For instance, Brower and Abolafia (1995) define resistance as a particular kind of action or inaction, and Ashforth and Mael (1998) define resistance as intentional acts of commission (defiance) or omission. Similarly, Shapiro, Lewicki, and Devine (1995) suggest that willingness to deceive authorities constitutes resistance to change, and Sagie, Elizur, and Greenbaum (1985) use compliant behavior as evidence of reduced resistance.

In contrast, other scholars have described resistance in emotional terms. For example, Coch and French (1948) acknowledged a more emotional component of resistance (aggression), and in their preliminary theory of resistance described the forces that they believed produced frustration in employees and caused the undesirable behaviors. Similarly, Vince and Broussine (1996) surfaced the responses of managers in public service organizations to a period of change in structure and financial constraints. They found that managers' responses were often paradoxically emotional. And, finally, the ideas of frustration and anxiety underpin Argyris and Schön's (1974, 1978) perspective that resistance arises from defensive routines. The approach that they advocate emphasizes the role of an external consultant in surfacing the defensiveness inherent in those routines, finding ways to

minimize or dissipate the anxiety that reinforces those routines, and making time for calmer consideration of how to repair them (Argyris, 1993). As Diamond (1986) points out, although the remedy for resistance that they recommend involves a cognitive realignment of resistors' espoused theories and their theories-in-use, the underlying nature of resistance is portrayed as highly emotional.

The idea that resistance can be overcome cognitively suggests that it may include a component of negative thoughts about the change. Watson (1982) suggests that what is often labeled as resistance is, in fact, only reluctance. Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder (1993) define resistance in behavioral terms but suggest that another state precedes it: a cognitive state they call "(un)readiness." A reinterpretation of the Coch and French quasi-experiment (Bartlem & Locke, 1981) suggests that participation might have motivational and cognitive effects on resistance to change, also implying that cognition is part of the phenomenon of resistance.

Each of these three emphases in conceptualizations of resistance—as a behavior, an emotion, or a belief—has merit and represents an important part of our experience of responses to change. Thus, any definition focusing on one view at the expense of the others seems incomplete. Therefore, rather than privilege one conceptualization over the others, I seek to integrate the three alternative views of resistance to change.

A NEW VIEW OF RESPONSES TO CHANGE: AMBIVALENT ATTITUDES

These three emphases in the conceptualization of resistance to change can be reframed in a more integrative way by borrowing the concept of attitude from social psychology. Mindful adaptation of the concept might be required, because the research on attitudes does not always provide clear guidance about which dimensions of attitudes are most salient.

Multiple Dimensions of Attitudes

Early attitude theorists (Katz, 1960; Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960) argued that attitudes are structured along three dimensions that roughly correspond with the three definitions that have dominated research on resistance to change. I label these three dimensions of attitudes the cognitive, emotional, and intentional. This conception is known as the tripartite view of attitudes (Ajzen, 1984).

In this view the cognitive dimension of an attitude refers to an individual's beliefs about the attitude object. In their review of the literature on the tripartite view, Eagly and Chaiken define this dimension as follows: "beliefs express positive or negative evaluation of greater or lesser extremity, and occasionally are exactly neutral in their evaluative content" (1998: 271). The emotional dimension of an attitude refers to an individual's feelings in response to the attitude object. Eagly and Chaiken define this dimension as the "feelings, moods, emotions, and sympathetic nervous-system activity that people have experienced in relation to an attitude object and subsequently associate with it" (1998: 272).

The third dimension of attitudes is the most complex and controversial, both because in some studies researchers find evidence of only two dimensions and because others who find a third dimension label it inconsistently. The findings of past empirical studies of the tripartite attitude structure are mixed (e.g., Bagozzi, 1978; Breckler, 1984; Kothandapani, 1971), and as Eagly and Chaiken conclude, "Evidence supports the empirical separability of three classes of evaluative responses under some but certainly not all circumstances" (1993: 13). In the traditional tripartite view, the conative dimension of an attitude reflects an individual's evaluations of an attitude object that are based in past behaviors and future intentions to act. Some researchers place more emphasis on past behaviors, whereas others focus on future intentions. In some cases a separate attitude dimension concerning intentions or behavior has been identified, but in other cases intentions are so loosely connected with other dimensions of attitudes that they have been treated as entirely separate constructs.

In the context considered here, because an employee facing a newly proposed organizational change is responding to a novel event, the conative dimension is more likely to reflect intentions than past behaviors. (The employee might not find the change process particularly novel, but the specific proposal is likely to have some novel aspects.) Also, it seems more desirable in this applied context to treat behavior as

a separate construct so that the mutual influences of attitudes and behavior on one another are not buried in an already complex set of issues. In other words, it is useful to distinguish between an intention to resist at the attitudinal level and dissent or protest at the level of actual behavior, which might or might not be planned. By "an intention" I mean a plan or resolution to take some action, rather than a plan to try to achieve some goal (Bagozzi, 1992).

Much of the work on resistance in labor process theory (e.g., Jermier et al., 1994), as well as some recent work on extrarole behaviors, such as taking charge (e.g., Morrison & Phelps, 1999), focuses on dissent or protest, whether intentional, habitual, or spontaneous. Distinguishing between intention and behavior will allow more careful study of the connections between the two concepts. Whether the intentional dimension is sufficiently associated with individuals' cognitive and emotional responses to be treated as a dimension of an employee's attitude remains an empirical question in the context of an attitude about a proposed organizational change.

One remaining contentious question in attitude research concerns the causal relationships among the dimensions. Fiske and Pavelchak (1986) label the two dominant positions in the debate the "piecemeal" and "category-based" views. In the piecemeal view, advanced by scholars such as Zanna and Rempel (1988), it is posited that variations in evaluation along the particular dimensions of an attitudinal response will cause variations in global attitude. In the category-based view (Ajzen, 1984; Davis & Ostrom, 1984), the global attitude is viewed as primary; changes in the global evaluation are modeled as causes of variation in the cognitive, emotional, and intentional dimensions, rather than as results of variation in those dimensions. Unfortunately, these views are still the subject of continuing debate in social psychology, and competing interpretations and new data are still being advanced.

In summary, questions of how the multiple dimensions of employee responses to change should be defined—and how they are related to one another—remain open to further clarification through empirical research. Social psychological research, however, clearly supports a multidimensional view of attitudes that can be used to integrate the inconsistent definitions of

resistance that have been found in organizational studies. Thus, an employee's response to an organizational change along the cognitive dimension might range from strong positive beliefs (i.e., "this change is essential for the organization to succeed") to strong negative beliefs (i.e., "this change could ruin the company"). An employee's response along the emotional dimension might range from strong positive emotions (such as excitement or happiness) to strong negative emotions (such as anger or fear). An employee's response along the intentional dimension might range from positive intentions to support the change to negative intentions to oppose it.

The Possibility of Ambivalence in Response to a Particular Change Proposal

One key benefit of using this multidimensional definition to describe employees' attitudes toward proposed changes is that conceptualizing each dimension as a separate continuum allows for the possibility of different reactions along the different dimensions. In some cases this might only mean that beliefs about a proposed change are more positive than emotional responses to the change. However, with this definition we also recognize the possibility, in other cases, of ambivalent attitudes, where two alternative perspectives are both strongly experienced (Foy, 1985; Merton, 1976; Thompson, Zanna, & Griffin, 1995).

The simplest case of ambivalence to imagine is the case in which an individual's cognitive response to a proposed change is in conflict with his or her emotional response to the proposal. Furthermore, ambivalence within a dimension is also possible, and, in fact, ambivalence within the emotional dimension already has been reported in research. In particular, Russell (1980) and Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988) have presented data suggesting that positive and negative affect can co-occur. Similarly, Vince and Broussine's (1996) study of public service managers' responses to change shows that incongruent emotions, such as excitement and fear, are often experienced simultaneously.

In principle, ambivalence could occur within the cognitive or intentional dimensions as well. For instance, an employee exhibiting cognitive ambivalence might simultaneously believe that the change proposed in his or her organization

is necessary for its future survival but is not yet sufficiently well researched. An employee exhibiting intentional ambivalence might plan to oppose a proposed change through anonymous comments in the suggestion box but might support the change in public because of uncertainty about how top management will respond to criticism of the change initiative. Although research does not shed any light on the likelihood of intentional ambivalence, anecdotal evidence of its occurrence can be found; Drummond's (1998) case study of a site manager's indirect opposition to the proposed closure of his facility has similar elements.

The Prevalence of Ambivalent Attitudes

The following examples of employees' responses to organizational change, drawn from interviews,[1] also illustrate the merits of assessing their attitudes toward change along three dimensions. In the first example an employee had learned that his budget for offering incentives to his distributors was disappearing. His emotional response to the announcement was quite negative. Because the budget cut was announced late in his planning cycle, the announcement shocked and frustrated him. However, he also reported a positive cognitive response to the change: he believed the change would have positive effects, since the budget for product improvements was being increased to allow his distributors to offer their customers a more attractive product. Thus, this employee's response represents an example of an ambivalent attitude toward the proposed budget change, because of the incongruity between his cognitive and emotional responses to the proposal.

A second example comes from an interview with a middle manager in a large, diversified company, who described his response to the restructuring and centralization of his organiza-

tion around a new enterprise-wide software system. His initial reaction to the restructuring included positive beliefs, because he felt the change was sorely needed, as well as positive emotions, reflected in expressions of enthusiasm. However, he reported increasingly negative intentions over time, and he planned to challenge his leadership to cancel the project if they would not provide the support that was needed. He later spoke out against the dangers of the "behemoth project." Although he still believed the change was needed, he was discouraged by his coworkers' lack of commitment. Thus, this manager's initial attitude can be represented as initially supportive, but it evolved to a more ambivalent state as his negative intentions solidified and his negative emotions toward his coworkers' laxity emerged.

The third example is drawn from an interview with a consultant who learned that his firm was merging with another consulting company. He initially responded with a combination of excitement and fear, demonstrating ambivalence within the emotional dimension of his response to the change. In his case that ambivalence motivated his efforts to gather information about the rationale for the merger and to assess the likelihood of job cuts in conjunction with it. Although he was not comfortable discussing the change with his superiors, because he did not want to reveal his fears and appear insecure, he and his peers were able to reassure each other through their surreptitious information gathering that the rationale for the merger was to acquire consulting skills in markets that his original firm had not already entered. As a result, he became an active supporter of the merger later on.[2]

In addition to this anecdotal evidence, there is also a theoretical reason to expect that most employees' responses to a proposed change will involve some ambivalence. We know from attitude research that the process of attitude formation often begins with ambivalence (e.g.,

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[1] To illustrate how the tripartite definition of attitudes could be used to describe employees' responses to organizational changes, I collected stories about employees' reactions to recently proposed changes in their organization. I conducted seven interviews with professionals and five with managers. The interviewees had varied functional backgrounds, and they described their reactions to three types of organizational changes (updating work processes, developing new initiatives, and restructuring). The interview protocol appears in Piderit (1999).

[2] These three employees' descriptions of their reactions to change were typical of the reactions reported in interviews, since most of the interviewees described their reactions to the organizational changes that they faced in terms of a mix of positive and negative thoughts, emotions, and behavioral intentions. Four of the twelve interviewees reported enduring ambivalence in response to the change they faced, and another five interviewees reported initial ambivalence.

Thompson et al., 1995). Furthermore, within the typology of alpha, beta, and gamma change, an initial response that is uniformly negative seems possible only in response to alpha changes, which involve a "variation in the level of [a] state, given a constantly calibrated measuring instrument" (Golembiewski, Billingsley, & Yeager, 1976: 134). Because some employees will already have formed an attitude toward the current point, they may be able to infer their attitude toward the proposed shift immediately.

However, as Beer and Walton (1987) point out, beta change involves developing a new understanding of what constitutes a shift on the reference dimension (or a "variation in the level of [a] state, complicated by the fact that some intervals of the measurement continuum ... have been recalibrated," according to Golembiewski et al. [1976: 134]). For example, a team trained in dialectic decision making might come to redefine what is meant by "too much conflict" in its meetings. Given the more complex process involved in making sense of a change proposal that involves such a recalibration, it seems unlikely that employees' inferences about their attitude toward a change proposal, such as the proposal to engage in a structured decision-making process, could be immediate.

Similarly, the gamma change process, which involves "a complete conceptual redefinition" (Beer & Walton, 1987: 342) and which may involve either the addition of new dimensions or the complete replacement of old reference dimensions with new ones (Porras & Silvers, 1991: 57), is even more complex. Thus, when facing beta or gamma change, employees seem more likely to engage in the formation of a new attitude, rather than simply shift their old attitude along a stable dimension. It seems reasonable to assume that most employees' initial responses to a beta or gamma change will be ambivalent.

For these reasons I conclude that conceptualizing employees' responses to proposed organizational changes as multidimensional attitudes permits a richer view of the ways in which employees may respond to change. Because of the potential for a multidimensional view of responses to change to inspire future research in such directions, I join Dent and Goldberg (1999) and Merron (1993) in arguing that we should retire the phrase "resistance to change," and I advocate a new wave of research on employee responses to change, conceptualized as multidimensional attitudes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

There are five key implications of this alternative view for research and practice. First, a multidimensional view of responses to proposed change may enhance our accuracy in predicting employee behaviors that have been difficult to predict in past research.

For example, understanding exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect has continued to challenge theorists and empirical researchers (Hirschman, 1970; Janssen, de Vries, & Cozijnsen, 1998; Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988; Saunders, Sheppard, Knight, & Warshaw, 1992; Withey & Cooper, 1989). One premise that could aid in developing such a predictive framework is the idea that employees find it more difficult to express negative emotions than negative beliefs. (This premise is certainly implicit in Argyris and Schön's [1974, 1978] work, although some employees may exhibit more facility than others in expressing their emotions.) From that premise it would follow that employees would be more likely to engage in voice than in loyalty or neglect when they experience ambivalence within their cognitive response to a proposed change. Because they can easily articulate their beliefs about the change, they would be more likely to share their reflections with the managers introducing the organizational change. Conversely, employees would be more likely to exhibit neglect when ambivalence occurs within the emotional dimension of their response to change or when an incongruity arises between their cognitive and their emotional reactions. Because it is difficult for them to articulate their negative emotional responses to change, they would be more likely to wrestle with their ambivalence alone or to avoid the subject entirely.

Similarly, understanding the nature of ambivalence in employee responses to change also might be useful in predicting the mode in which employees will communicate their responses to change agents and in identifying the most appropriate process for addressing their responses. For instance, when employees are experiencing emotional ambivalence rather than uniformly negative responses to a proposed change, they may be more likely to express their

responses through humor (e.g., Rodrigues & Collinson, 1995) or other indirect modes of communication (e.g., Drummond, 1998). In such a case, more data about the change initiative might not be very useful, even if it can be provided efficiently in large-scale rollout meetings. Instead, more impromptu and casual conversations might be more effective in creating an atmosphere in which employees feel safe expressing their negative emotional responses openly.

Conversely, when employees are experiencing cognitive ambivalence about a proposed change but no negative emotional responses, they may be quite direct in expressing their concerns. In such a case, change agents might find that their listening ability is more important than their ability to communicate their own perspectives on the change to employees. Overselling the benefits of the change may not be effective in securing employee support, if employees already accept that the change will have some positive outcomes but feel a different perspective is required.

Of course, the merits of these premises are empirical questions, to be examined in future research on predicting employee voice, loyalty, and neglect and in research on the modes in which employee responses to change are expressed and managed.

A second key implication of the new multidimensional view of employee responses to proposed organizational changes is that the degree of ambivalence in an employee's attitude may have both desirable and undesirable consequences. Paying attention to balancing those consequences will help us understand how to manage change processes successfully. A variety of research indicates that divergent opinions about direction are necessary in order for groups to make wise decisions and for organizations to change effectively. For instance, recent research on institutionalized dissent (Cohen & Staw, 1998) shows that, sometimes, organizations encourage and plan for dissent and ritualize disagreement. Although the fact that organizations encourage dissent does not necessarily imply that dissent is functional, it is one reasonable explanation for the prevalence of such an organizational practice.

Furthermore, research on organizational learning indicates that disagreement and disconfirmation of expectations can be important triggers for developing knowledge. In fact, Bar-

nett argues that "an emphasis on failure, negative feedback, stress, or 'crisis' as a learning stimulus has eclipsed the potential importance of other meaningful stimuli (e.g., opportunities, people, and success)" (1994: 8) as conditions that foster learning. Similarly, research on strategic change processes indicates that disagreement can play a key role in supporting organizational renewal. Studies by Barr, Stimpert, and Huff (1992), Burgelman (1991), and Floyd and Wooldridge (1996) show that if the organization's managers do not experiment, it seems unlikely that they will be able to carry out a renewal process. The implication of all this research is that moving too quickly toward congruent positive attitudes toward a proposed change might cut off the discussion and improvisation that may be necessary for revising the initial change proposal in an adaptive manner.

It is not clear, however, whether the expression of resistance (i.e., uniformly negative responses to change) is likely to encourage continued discussion, debate, and improvisation. Indeed, the honest expression of ambivalence seems more likely to generate dialogue than the expression of either determined opposition or firm support.

Several research pieces also indicate that ambivalence and its acknowledgment might have positive effects. Pratt and Barnett (1997) argue that ambivalence is needed to stimulate unlearning (the discarding of obsolete and misleading knowledge), which is a necessary precursor to change. Similarly, Weigert and Franks argue that the expression of ambivalence in public "is likely to lead to public collective responses" (1989: 223), suggesting that acknowledging ambivalence can provide a basis for motivating new action, rather than the continuation of old routines. Furthermore, recent research on creativity indicates that "insight is primarily dependent on analogical retrieval. . . . moreover, this retrieval usually is cued by some external event" (Sternberg, 1988: 3). Work by Langley and Jones (1988) and by Weisberg (1988) shows that the ability to perceive a situation from a different angle or to apply a novel analogy is often the key to finding a previously unconsidered alternative that may lead to novel behavior. All this work suggests that by fostering ambivalence and reframing our understanding of the status quo, we are better able to generate new possibilities for understanding and action.

For change agents and for theorists, the strategy of fostering ambivalence rather than support in the early stages of a change initiative invites a different view of how the first stage of a change process should play out. The first stage in creating change should be generating widespread conversation, rather than beginning the change process by engaging a small group of managers in identifying the desired change and later aiming to gain broader employee support for that proposal. This strategy is less consistent with a view of change as a planned process (Porras & Silvers, 1991) and more consistent with a microlevel perspective on change as a continuous process in which "ongoing adaptation and adjustment" occur (Weick & Quinn, 1999: 362). Some models of this type of change process are emerging, such as the trialectic view of change advocated by Ford and Ford (1994) and the five-stage process model of breakaway organizations developed by Dyck and Starke (1999). How change agents begin to generate conversation around ambivalence about new possibilities is an important question for future research on the first phase of the change process.

Ambivalence, however, must be fostered with care; we also know from other streams of research that acknowledging ambivalence might not always be optimal. On the one hand, Weigert and Franks warn that "if ambivalence is not ritually enacted and meaningfully interpreted, its power to fuel extreme responses grows" (1989: 223). On the other hand, Schwartz (1986) examined the effect of inner dialogue on personal and relational well-being and found that an inner dialogue characterized by a high ratio of positive to negative statements was associated with greater well-being. This finding suggests that acknowledging both polarities of an ambivalent attitude toward a change proposal with equal time might be unhealthy. Thus, the question that emerges for research and practice concerns the tensions generated by fostering ambivalence: How can we balance the need for ambivalence with the need to limit its debilitating effects?

A third key implication of the new multidimensional view concerns the need to expand our research beyond our past focus on top-down organizational change. Increasingly, change processes are managed in emergent and democratic ways. However, our theorizing may not be keeping pace, except in some emerging research. For example, in the appreciative inquiry process (Cooperrider, 1998; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), the proposal emerges from and is tempered and repeatedly revised by an inclusive dialogue among a large number of employees across many levels of hierarchy. In this approach the important question of what it means to respond to a "proposed change" is framed, when the nature of the change that is proposed remains ambiguous for much of the process. Here, finding answers to the questions of how multiple dimensions of an employee's responses to a change evolve over time and how such shifts are related to the effectiveness with which change is implemented seems even more important.

A fourth implication of these ideas is that employee responses to change may evolve over time, and paying attention to this evolution might yield insights about how to manage change initiatives successfully. For example, a formal change announcement from the CEO may shift employees' cognitive responses to a change quite quickly from negative to positive, but their emotional responses may require more time to shift from negative to positive, through many informal conversations after the formal rollout speech. Observing patterns of attitudes and ambivalence over time might be more useful in predicting the success of a change initiative than examining the favorability of employees' attitudes toward the change at any one point in time. The implication is that both scholars and managers need to pay more attention to the dynamic processes that help to acknowledge and sustain ambivalence without letting it impede the momentum of change.

A final implication of these ideas is that scholars who wish to understand the full range of individual responses to proposed organizational changes should assess those responses along multiple dimensions. Applied research is needed to continue the process of mindfully adapting the concept of tripartite attitudes from social psychology. Relevant methods for operationalizing the dimensions could include interviews (Piderit, 1998), surveys (Piderit, 1999), and even more novel approaches, such as drawing (Vince & Broussine, 1996).

CONCLUSION

There is power in metaphor, but the physical metaphor of "resistance to change" may have taken us as far as we can go. In this article I critiqued research on resistance to change for failure to take the good intentions of resistors seriously and for the varying emphases in conceptualizations of resistance. I proposed a new conception of responses to proposed organizational changes as multidimensional attitudes. This new conception is intended to encourage an appreciation for the prevalence of ambivalence in individuals' responses to change. Investigations of what motivates those responses to change also will be needed, as well as studies of both the positive and the negative consequences of ambivalence of different types.

These ideas are not all new to the field, but earlier admonitions about the benefits of employee input and the drawbacks of dismissing subordinates' responses to change were not consistently brought to center stage in organization studies. If we can do better, we will be able to offer guidance to all employees involved in change processes and not just to change agents with official authority. Our research will begin to give equal attention to top-down, planned change and to bottom-up or egalitarian change processes. Finally, we will take on the challenge of helping organization members reap the benefits of ambivalence toward change for organizations while minimizing its potentially stressful effects for individuals.

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