



Kraft att förändra.

Using Grid to Overcome Resistance to Change

Today, modern business is embroiled in a constant dilemma of increasing need for change and the natural resistance in people to change. Strides in technology and communications are challenging the way companies do business on virtually every level, but the fact is that results often suffer because people fail to embrace the changes with a deep sense of commitment.

People usually favor, or even encourage change when it involves someone else. In the workplace, leaders may advocate dramatic change in another team, or another division, or another site altogether. Change is also usually welcomed when it involves enhancing already proven or widely supported skills. For example, people rarely object when asked to upgrade to a new and improved computer system or software, or learn a new procedure that increases efficiency.

Resistance emerges when the change in question impacts people on a personal level. Change becomes threatening when it involves the habits, traditions, and relationships in place that are proven, known, and, most importantly, familiar to a person. Resistance is even stronger when the change addresses or questions a person's effectiveness in the workplace. This kind of change hits people where they live by challenging the basic image they hold of themselves. No one wants to be singled out as the poor performer in the group, and in some groups, no one wants to be singled out as an overachiever who thinks he or she is better than other members.

The problem with change at this personal level is the seemingly insurmountable gap between intended versus actual behavior. The gap is caused by *self deception*, and creates a barrier to achieving change. Just because a person is ordered to change, or knows change is needed and wants to change doesn't mean he or she knows *how* to change.

How is this wall of resistance overcome? The first step is to provide a model of what sound and unsound

leadership looks like. The Grid model helps individuals and teams see their actual behavior in comparison with behavior they think is sounder. This comparison allows teams to begin addressing weaknesses and barriers that prevent change from happening.

The second step is to increase the level of candor present in teams. This allows teams to begin to follow through with change strategies based on openness and candor. For this to happen, members must feel free to participate in critique without recrimination. "What is right", not "Who is right" becomes a corporate norm and standard. Something as simple as openness can eliminate most fears in the workplace because many of the fears are built on poor assumptions and misunderstandings. With mutual trust and respect comes increased commitment to team achievement and an increased sense of personal contribution. Synergy also becomes possible as inhibitions and fears no longer keep people from speaking up. Resources that were once hidden or repressed emerge in creative and innovative ways.

Whenever management or leadership at any level attempts to create change of any magnitude, the very first question to be asked should be "Are we in management facing up to the barriers preventing change from occurring, or are we ignoring and perpetuating them?" Only in this way can management actually appreciate the degree and complexity inherent in the changes they are asking of the organization and prepare themselves for the job of leadership ahead. By experiencing firsthand the intellectual and emotional challenge of questioning familiar and even popular ideas, they lead by example at the outset. Management's willingness to articulate their part in the problem becomes an example of openness, honesty, and candor they hope to see occurring with others down through successive levels of the organization as the change process gains acceptance. They are willing to "walk the talk."

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Causes of Resistance to Change

The question is “What blocks awareness and causes resistance to change at the individual level? There are three major barriers. If leaders can understand these barriers, and how to overcome them, they can achieve lasting and effective change.

- The lack of a clear model of what sound leadership looks like
- Individual fears that create an unwillingness to confront problems, share ideas, and face up to weaknesses
- Group dynamics (norms and standards) that strengthen existing fears in individuals, and create even stronger resistance to change in groups

A Model of Sound Leadership

A comprehensive model of leadership provides an objective, stand-alone model of teamwork effectiveness. With a theory or model, the learning is self convincing, which makes it much more powerful than the autocratic approach to leadership, “Do it because I said so.” Unlike having a leader simply tell people how to behave, the model lets them make up their own mind about what style is effective and why. Concrete examples and descriptions provide enough information to make a comparative evaluation based on facts instead of adopting a style because it is easy or sounds good. A style is embraced and emulated because people are convinced it’s the soundest approach.

The power of the Grid is found in the multi-perspective approach. In order to use it effectively, leaders must involve those around them. A person’s perception of his or her effectiveness is only a piece of the puzzle. In order to succeed in achieving change, each member, including the leader, compares these self-perceptions with how others experience him or her on a daily basis. By comparing several points of view within the Grid framework, any person can explore ways to change while gaining involvement, and support from the people most likely to be able to help – the ones who work with him or her day in and day out.

The comparison offers a starting point for individual change. People begin to see themselves in a more realistic way, based on what others experience. Since

most people want to be more effective, they naturally feel a deeper level of commitment to changing a behavior when they know it’s ineffective. The commitment is deeper and more personal than it would be if change were simply ordered or imposed.

At the team level, members reach a new plateau of effectiveness. Candor and critique allow people to explore underlying attitudes, personal goals, fears, and assumptions to ultimately help each other change. This awareness leads members to create a model of effectiveness, which allows for team-level change to begin. At the organization level, the framework offers a compass for the entire organization to use to gain commitment to widespread change.

Individual Fears and the Resistance to Change: The Grid Perspective

Everyone has fears that motivate how he or she reacts to a confrontation, crisis, criticism, or failure. A useful starting point for understanding how individual resistance develops is to review what motivates resistance from the point of view of individual Grid styles. These develop at different times in a person’s life and from many different experiences.

The positive motivation reflects what result a person considers desirable. How he or she relates to others reflects a fundamental attitude or desire that he or she seeks to accomplish. In the workplace, these desires are complicated by the fact that he or she works with and through colleagues, subordinates, and supervisors to obtain results. When these desires are being met, resistance to change is minimal because fears are diminished. The leader in question has effectively reached a level of confidence and comfort.

The negative motivation reflects what he or she fears. This is where resistance to change emerges. When the confidence and comfort of the desired result is threatened, behavior changes in ways that promise a greater chance of securing the desired results. We go back to the survival skills that we have learned in the past, sometimes as far back as childhood.

Without awareness of the motivational resistance to change at work, people become defensive, evasive, frustrated, and lose commitment and follow through. It is at this point where the change program begins to

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hit its first and biggest barrier and loses momentum. Individuals get together to complain and commiserate and generate pockets of negative energy. This human dynamic is very subtle yet extraordinary powerful. Because of this subtlety the resistance is most often missed when it initially occurs, and only becomes apparent later when the hard results begin to show that yet another “change” program has not delivered its expected results. The pressures to change are great and most managers and leaders react to this by expecting too much, too fast, too often. Humans are very creative and can find many ways to make it look like they are accepting the new changes but in reality they are not. During periods of global change such as is currently occurring, corporations that fail to understand this resistance to change can face extinction. The world has countless examples of organizations, companies, and governments that no longer exist because they didn’t or couldn’t overcome their inherent human resistance to change.

Group Dynamics and Resistance to Change

When individuals come together in teams to achieve results, group dynamics enter the picture, adding a new dimension to individual fears. These dynamics include the formation of norms and standards, and how groups converge around them.

Group Norms and Personal Attitudes

Trying to implement change is futile without understanding the power and impact of norms and how to change them. With this knowledge, however, the manager is equipped with an essential tool to implement change. We experience our attitudes as private, personal, and unique to each of us. What we fail to realize is that many of our attitudes arise from the organization group norms of which we are members. As a result, our attitudes determine the quality of our work effort more than we realize.

Norms and Behavior

Teams are characterized by the norms their members share. We may speak of individuals as having attitudes; however, it is more customary to use norms and traditions when referring to a group. Even though individuals are the “carriers”, norms and traditions belong to groups, not individuals.

Whenever two or more people share a norm, it is likely they also feel and express similar attitudes and values. These shared attitudes are difficult to describe unless a group member deviates from them. Experimental research shows that if one team member fails to complete the “normal” share of work, others view him or her as dependent, irresponsible, or perhaps lazy. By comparison, if one member of a work group exceeds others in the group by doubling individual output, that individual may be seen as “do-gooder” who thinks he’s better than other team members. Group members develop negative attitudes toward this person as well. In both cases, group members ostracize the person who pushes the boundaries of the norm by under- or over-achieving.

Of course, not all norms promote sound and effective behavior. A norm may be effective initially but later become outmoded and ineffective. When this occurs, group members may stay engaged in outdated activities simply because it’s commonplace. The key to whether a normative system is sound and valid is whether it meets current requirements for profit and continued customer satisfaction.

How Norms Arise

It is important to realize that norms and individual attitudes are closely related. Both refer to the same phenomena looked at from two different perspectives. In one case the view is from the perspective of the group and in the other it is from the perspective of the individual. What this means is that individuals pick up their attitudes, opinions, feelings, and actions from the groups to which they belong. Yet when we examine our own personal attitudes, opinions, and feelings, we tend to think of them as private and unique. Because these attitudes, opinions, and feelings seem natural and internally consistent, we think they originate in our private thinking and to have little relationship to our group memberships.

This creates a paradox because while research shows that our attitudes are shaped more by our group memberships, our own subjective experiences suggest that they come from personal thinking and judgment. How is the contradiction resolved?

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Convergence

One of the difficulties in understanding how people come to share attitudes, opinions, feelings, and actions is because they are hidden and silent. They are the blind habits that people adopt and incorporate as routine without really thinking about why. This makes it difficult to isolate the originating moment for a norm.

The dynamic involved is called convergence.

Convergence explains how people tend to shift their attitudes, opinions, feelings, and actions toward one another regarding an activity. When we realize that much of business life fits this mold, we also realize that convergence can operate strongly to influence personal behavior. Even though convergence influences individuals, people don't necessarily see themselves as having been influenced

Cohesion

There are two other dynamics, which apply here, both of which have been empirically proven much like the laws of convergence. The first is the dynamic of cohesion – the phenomenon of congregating around common interests and values. It is one of the most significant standard for social organization. In every day terms we may say "Birds of a feather flock together". People are naturally attracted to others with whom they share common interests, common values, and experiences.

Conformity

The other dynamic is called the law of conformity. This is the phenomenon of changing an attitude to be more consistent, or "fit in", with group norms. Convergence introduces the norms by establishing patterns of behavior in groups. Cohesion accelerates their development as people endorse and support these patterns of behavior. Conformity enforces the norm by creating pressure within the group to fit in with the majority. The price of non-conformity is rejection.

All three of these laws of human dynamics have a silent, subtle, but very powerful effect on human behavior and action. Like other natural laws of the planet, they operate 24 hours a day, rain or shine, profit or loss, whether we like it or not. Understanding and employing this natural process provides leaders with one of the most powerful and effective tools in change management.

Conformity in Organization Life: The Effect of Norms and Standards

Organization members conform to requirements placed on them by colleagues and superiors; this is a core aspect of corporate culture. The readiness to conform is what permits regularity, order, and predictability. Adhering to group norms provides a basis for any organized effort. Self-regulated conformity brings a sense of identification, membership, and high morale. On the other hand, failure to conform may stir resentment so that the nonconformist faces rejection and ostracism from the group.

Conformity in itself is not good or bad. It's a natural human dynamic that cannot be stopped. When based on unsound values and attitudes, however, conformity can block change initiatives. Barriers in the form of entrenched traditions, precedents and past practices, along with fears and resistance may become so great, that the capacity to change is lost because the conformity becomes an end in itself. People continue to carry out an outmoded procedure because the activity is so familiar and ingrained, they don't even question it. "That's the way we have always done it." When the dynamic of conformity is understood, people resist accepting norms at their face value, and instead comparing them against standards of excellence. Excuses like, "We've always don't it that way" "The majority of us think we should do it that way" or even "The boss thinks we should do it that way" are overlooked as people instead ask, "What is the best way?" Ineffectiveness can be reduced and creativity stimulated for finding new and better ways of accomplishing corporate objectives.

Achieving Change

The largest barrier to change is the lack of candor present in the workplace. It's a fact of human nature that people will converge around norms, regardless of how sound or unsound they may be. If you combine this fact of human dynamics with a company culture that encourages convergence around unsound norms, they become even harder to change because people join forces in protecting them. Even when colleagues see unsound practices, resistance, fears, and conformity pressure keeps them silent.

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The most realistic prospect for achieving change and alleviating ineffectiveness in management, sales, or administration is to shift attention away from tradition, precedents, past practices, and onto standards of excellence. This new level of objectivity joined with a culture of openness and candor allows people to control the company culture instead of being controlled by it.

Leaders can take control of their culture by understanding and employing each of the following, and using the combined skills of candor, consensus, conflict resolution, and critique to determine:

- How norms develop and are subsequently maintained.
- How groups can examine and change the attitudes driving the norms.
- How an organization can strengthen its performance by promoting relationships that foster a commitment to achieving excellence.

The important questions to consider are: Is it possible for an organization to deliberately and explicitly change the attitudes of its employees? Can leaders create positive attitudes toward performance to achieve quality results?

Our point of view is that it is possible to make the shift through the sound leadership of attitudes toward proposed changes. This sound leadership of attitudes involves examining and understanding the dynamic of fear and its influence on norms and standards and taking proactive steps to manage it. Usually it is based on 1) asking for participation (rather than telling people what to do), and 2) putting the responsibility for change in the hands of the people carrying it out: the intact work teams who face the norms every day. When managers make time to examine these issues during their regular meetings, teams become very current with the myriad of subtle and powerful influences than can effectively derail change efforts.

Many companies have endeavored to improve themselves without taking advantage of these insights into the dynamics of relationships and behavior. Many leaders assume that barriers to change are found on the business or operational side only. However, the reasons for the operational difficulties are more likely based

on unsound relationships and behavior. A company's own culture can support or strongly work against its efforts to promote needed change. Exerting pressure to improve operational results without understanding and resolving the human conditions that cause limitations only addresses the symptoms, and although short-term benefit may result, the problems go underground and resurface. When candor is discouraged, people may publicly agree to changes and then privately undermine efforts. Team members not involved in shaping the change effort may comply, but feel little personal stake and commitment beyond what's expected. This is how human dynamics weaken change efforts. As a result, creative alternatives are overlooked, and innovations are never pursued.

Developing strong relationships is an important step for mobilizing resources in a company. Excellence is not likely to be achieved without a clear model that everyone agrees is sound. The critical ingredient is missing—motivated people who are knowledgeable about managing social dynamics. Implementing change through mobilizing the energies of people and bringing the behavioral dynamics of the group under insightful management significantly increases the likelihood of successful or even synergistic accomplishment.

Summary

- Using the Grid to overcome the resistance to change provides the organization with a clear model of what sound leadership looks like.
- Address the individual fears that create unwillingness to confront problems, share ideas, and face up to weaknesses by introducing sound teamwork skills and candor.
- Understand and utilize the inherent power residing in group dynamics (norms and standards) to motivate team performance.
- Employ ongoing critique with high levels of openness, honesty and candor across teams, and ultimately, the entire organization.

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