

**Planning and Managing
Change**

Edgar H. Schein

90s: 88-056

Sloan WP#2069
August 1988
Revised October 1988

©1988 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Management in the 1990s
Sloan School of Management
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Management in the 1990s

Management in the 1990s is an industry and governmental agency supported research program. Its aim is to develop a better understanding of the managerial issues of the 1990s and how to deal most effectively with them, particularly as these issues revolve around anticipated advances in Information Technology.

Assisting the work of the Sloan School scholars with financial support and as working partners in research are:

American Express Company
BellSouth Corporation
British Petroleum Company, p.l.c.
CIGNA Corporation
Digital Equipment Corporation
Eastman Kodak Company
Ernst & Young
General Motors Corporation
International Computers Ltd.
MCI Communications Corporation
United States Army
United States Internal Revenue Service

The conclusions or opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Management in the 1990s Research Program, or its sponsoring organizations.

The purpose of this paper is to lay out a model of "planned managed change," and to show how it applies to the implementation of information technology (IT) projects. Resistance to change is a ubiquitous phenomenon and is often treated as a mysterious and intractable force, implying negative motives and attitudes on the part of the resisters. It is the purpose of this analysis to show that resistance to change is a normal understandable phenomenon, and to show how an understanding of the change process can help to overcome such resistance.

Systems as Quasi-stationary Equilibria of Multiple Forces

In order to understand any kind of change, we must first have a model of a "system" in a steady state, what Kurt Lewin so aptly called a "quasi-stationary equilibrium" (Lewin, 1952; Schein, 1972, 1985, 1987). A system can be an individual, a group, or an entire organization, and any given system is usually composed of a number of sub-systems. So when we do this kind of analysis it is helpful at the outset to decide what system we are focusing on.

The basic assumption is that any living system is always in a state of change (growth, metamorphosis, or decline), but

that all systems are homeostatic, that is, they always tend toward some kind of equilibrium. This equilibrium is achieved by a balance of forces pushing in different directions. But, because there are many forces acting, a change in some of these forces will move the equilibrium to a new level. In this sense the equilibrium is only "quasi-stationary."

If one is to change the equilibrium level of a dynamic system such as a group or department or whole organization, one must first identify with respect to one's change goal, what the relevant forces are that are acting on that system. This process, called "force-field analysis," is then a first step in any managed change program. If our analysis reveals that the unit being changed is composed of a number of inter-connected sub-systems, then we have to analyze each subsystem. We cannot assume that the same forces apply across all of the sub-systems. How this is done will be detailed later in this paper.

Stages of the Change Process

Any change process can be conceptualized as consisting of three stages or phases, based on the above model of quasi-stationary equilibria-- a stage of unfreezing, a stage of changing, and a stage of refreezing. No change will occur unless the system is unfrozen, and no change will last unless the system is refrozen. Most change theories tend to focus only on the middle stage and then cannot account for inability to produce change in the first place, or inability to maintain the changes that have been achieved. The stages and their processes are outlined in

Table 1.

Put Table 1 about here

Unfreezing

By far the most difficult and important stage is the stage of unfreezing, the creation of a motivation to change. This is accomplished by changing the forces acting on the system such that:

- 1) The present state is somehow disconfirmed;
- 2) Some anxiety or guilt is aroused because some goals will not be met or standards will not be achieved;
- 3) Enough "psychological safety" is provided to make it unnecessary for the target individuals or groups to psychologically defend themselves because the disconfirming information is too threatening or the anxiety or guilt are too high.

The essence of an effective unfreezing process is a balancing of enough disconfirmation to arouse an optimal level of anxiety or guilt, without arousing so much as to cause denial, repression, projection, or some other defense mechanism. Most analyses of unfreezing limit themselves to step 1-- how to disconfirm or create pain-- and fail to note that unless the pain is connected to something the members of the system care about, and unless they feel safe enough to feel they can do something about it, they have not really been unfrozen at all.

How the unfreezing occurs will vary with the circumstan-

ces. Often we find change easy to manage because we encounter a system that is already unfrozen (e.g. the turnaround manager who takes over a company that knows that unless it changes it will be bankrupt and no-one will have a job). It is in the nature of systems that they can be partially unfrozen by information that has been received at some earlier time, but that not enough psychological safety has been present to allow the individual or group to consciously accept the necessity of change.

We see this in individual psychodynamics where in adulthood we "finally" deal with criticisms or feedback that we may have received from parents or peers as children, but have repressed until we felt secure enough to change. The observer may be surprised at what seems to be a change without unfreezing, because he or she may not be aware of the prior disconfirmation that had taken place. When we speak of systems as being "ready to change," we often mean that they have had strong disconfirmation in the past but have not felt secure enough to do something about their situation.

If the system is not already unfrozen the change agent has to develop a way of surfacing disconfirming information, a process that is sometimes difficult and time consuming. And then the information has to be developed in a way that is not too threatening. The role of the change agent in unfreezing systems is, therefore, one of the most important and yet most difficult.

When strong disconfirmation is needed, the person in authority is often in the best position to provide it, but is often also the person most likely to cause too much threat and

thus arouse defensiveness. In such situations managers often use outside consultants to provide the strong disconfirmation on the theory that it is easier to accept negative information from a presumably objective outsider. But such outside information is often easy to discount on the grounds that the consultant "did not really understand our situation."

What the effective manager acting as a change agent, must try to convey simultaneously is:

- 1) Your present behavior or attitude is unacceptable (disconfirmation);
- 2) It is violating some of our standards or is causing us to fail in getting the job done (induction of guilt and/or anxiety); but,
- 3) I will help you to change and make you feel safe while you learn a new behavior or attitude (creation of psychological safety).

One of the reasons why it is important for people who become targets of change to be involved early in the change process is that one cannot assess how they will be threatened by the disconfirmation or what problems they will have in making the change unless one explores what help they will need to make the change. The manager as change agent can be quite rigid in step 1 if he or she adequately manages step 2 and 3.

An IT Example. In a study conducted of CEO's we found that a number of them concluded that executive work stations operated by the manager could be a useful executive tool for electronic mail, word processing, MIS/MIC, and various kinds of

spread-sheet analysis and modelling. The problem they faced was how to get their various subordinates to accept the work stations and to learn how to use them.

The disconfirmation typically came in the form of the CEO announcing to his subordinates that he would start to monitor some of their division or unit performance in terms of regular reports that appeared directly on the CEO's terminal, and would ask them questions about it. In other words past systems of reporting and monitoring would no longer be acceptable. Or he might say that he would start to communicate with them by means of electronic mail only, and would put important messages into the system by this means. In other words, the subordinates found out that their routine behavior would no longer work with respect to parts of their job, and they clearly felt anxious about their boss finding out things they did not themselves know or telling them things that they might not pick up. One can also assume that a number of them felt guilty about not using "modern" technologies and executive support systems.

At the same, however, effective CEO's not only provided the necessary terminals, but, more importantly, created training programs and provided coaches that would make it easy for the subordinates to learn, and that would help them to overcome whatever insecurity they might have about changing. If the degree of threat or basis of the insecurity was more fundamental, something that we will see below would have been revealed in a force-field analysis, then additional unfreezing would have to occur with respect to those people.

Another powerful disconfirming force is the presentation of credible information that using a new system will dramatically increase productivity or quality, but, again, if the source of threat is that such a system will cause people to lose their jobs, some psychological safety has to be created before the message will be accepted.

Changing Through Cognitive Redefinition

What unfreezing does is to motivate the change target to look for new solutions that will bring things back into equilibrium, and that will once again produce confirming information that things are "OK." Where previously information, ideas, suggestions, or even orders were ignored, once someone is unfrozen, he or she is more likely to pay attention. They become active problem solvers because they are uncomfortable.

If we are dealing with complex attitudinal change or changes in shared basic assumptions (culture), we have the additional problem that the new attitude or assumption may initially not be understandable to the change targets. They know "something" is wrong with the way they are thinking, but they cannot conceive of any alternative way of thinking. For this kind of situation, either or both of two change mechanisms have to be considered:

- 1) Scanning the environment until a new formulation is found and trying out various kinds of new behavior until something that works is found; and/or
- 2) Finding a role model and learning a new point of view through psychological "identification," learning by

seeing the world through the eyes of the role model.

In either case, the new information causes change by allowing "cognitive re-definition" to take place. For example, when PCs are introduced into the executive suite, for some people it will simply be a matter of learning a new skill that will not require any cognitive re-definition. But for some managers the dilemma will be that they see themselves as working primarily with and through people, that they gather information through face-to-face contacts, that they rely on their gut feel and intuition to process information, and that they only trust their ability to be persuasive in interpersonal encounters. They may have developed the assumption that numerical data of the sort that are processed in MIS/MIC systems are not good enough to act on in the first place, and that communicating via E-mail makes it impossible to tell what the other person is really thinking. It is therefore inconceivable to them how IT can be seen as an executive tool at all.

Such managers may be unfrozen in that they have been strongly disconfirmed by their own bosses and feel ready to change, but they truly don't know what to do, and they feel very threatened because the assumptions on which they have built their self-image of effectiveness are being challenged. If the CEO presses hard enough they may scan the environment in the form of trying various kinds of partial solutions, looking for PCs that might be more versatile or user friendly, until they find something that seems to work.

Or, more likely, they will find a fellow executive who

is enough like them to be a role model, and who has learned to use the IT tools. They will identify with that person and try to learn to see the world through his or her eyes. As they do this they will cognitively redefine what the managerial job is, gradually changing some of their assumptions about their own intuitive style and learning some of the new assumptions underlying the information technology solutions. Most likely this will involve cognitive "broadening" in the sense that they will learn how to use IT to enhance their intuitive style, and how to use E mail to supplement their face to face encounters. The nature of managerial work will be redefined in their head.

Refreezing

Once the person has achieved a new set of cognitions and attitudes, there remains the problem of refreezing. If others with whom the person works do not support the new point of view, they will simply cause another change process to occur or the person will revert to the original view. Or if the new point of view is too alien to other parts of his or her personality, over time the new point of view will erode and again the person will revert. For change to stick it has to be integrated into the total psychic framework or personality, and has to be supported by others whose opinions and perceptions the person cares about.

In the example of the CEO and his subordinates, if a given manager learns to use the terminal and finds himself in a new group that disdains such use, he will likely unlearn and revert to his old attitude. Or, if he finds that his thinking

style is genuinely incompatible with what the IT systems require of him he, will find excuses or, in the extreme, leave the group. One reason why user involvement is so critical in the introduction of IT systems, is that unless they are involved, the system is likely to demand behavior that fundamentally does not fit the user situation, and will, therefore never be refrozen.

The commonest example of failure of refreezing is when we train people off site and then find that within weeks they have "forgotten" everything they learned during training. The problem is not forgetting, but that the new behavior or attitude does not fit personally or into the group situation and is, therefore, actively unlearned. For any change to be managed effectively, the change agent must plan for all three stages and must insure that each stage is successfully traversed.

A Map of the Change Management Process

The best formulation for thinking about the total change process is the road map provided by Beckhard and Harris (1987) as shown in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The first step is the most fundamental--providing a credible answer to the question of "Why Change?" Too many change processes are begun without a clear logic or goals that make sense. And if the logic isn't clear to the change agent, it surely will have no chance of ever being clear to the change

targets. In selecting a change goal, five sets of issues or questions need to be addressed:

1) What is the change agent's motivation? Whose interests will ultimately be served by the proposed change?

2) Is there a real need for change? Whose needs are really the critical driving forces toward change? Is there a choice about whether or not to make the change?

3) How realistic and feasible is the change? Are there ultimate forces that would prevent a change no matter what?

4) Where is the energy for change? What forces are already available to harness to the change project?

5) How unfrozen is the system? If it is not unfrozen how can one unfreeze it?

Notice that although unfreezing is the first stage of the actual change process, one should not start an unfreezing process until one has answered questions 1 to 4 to one's satisfaction. The CEO's in my previous IT example must be clear why they want to institute given systems, whose interests will be served, how feasible it will be to get their subordinates to actually use the systems, how much energy there is to make the change, and how much unfreezing will be required?

As part of the preliminary diagnostic process one should also tackle the question of what is the present state of the system and what is the desired future state? As Beckhard and Harris point out in their book, each of these diagnostic activities can, in their own right, be complicated and time consuming.

Once the present and future state have been defined, the

change agent can concentrate on defining the process of getting from here to there and providing for the management of the transition process. In deciding on each of these steps the change agent must also be clear about the various systems involved in the change. The various diagnostic tools to be described below pertain to each of the above steps, and, more importantly, also help to define the various systems and sub-systems that have to be considered in any change program.

Force Field Analysis

The essence of this technique is to analyze for any given system what is keeping a quasi-stationary equilibrium in its present state, and from this diagnosis to determine which forces to attempt to alter in order to unfreeze the system. To do this analysis one must first specify a present state and a desired state for the system, as shown in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here

On the left of the line we can identify what are called "driving forces," forces that are already acting in the direction in which we want to move. For example, if we are trying to increase productivity in a worker group, driving forces might be supervisory pressure, piece work incentives, extra training for workers, better tools and machines, competitor pressures, competition among worker groups, pride, desire to save the company and hence one's own job, and so on. As one fills in the driving

forces that may already be acting one is often puzzled why productivity does not go up? Something must be restraining it.

On the right side of the line we can plot what those restraining forces might be. For example, we might find that workers are cynical and don't believe management's argument that more productivity is essential to the survival of the company. Or, they might believe that if they work harder for the incentives, that sooner or later the piece work rate itself will be cut, or that if they become more productive some workers will be laid off. Over the years these forces may have led to group norms of a "fair day's work for a fair day's pay" and no-one wants to be a rate buster. Or workers may resent the close supervision they are getting and are resisting all supervisory input just to get back at supervision. The actual forces identified will, of course, reflect the actual situation that is being analyzed.

In order to be thorough about identifying forces, I have put at the bottom of Figure 2 the various categories of forces that one should consider, from the broader technological, social, economic, political, and cultural forces down to individual forces.

Taking Action Based on the Force Field Analysis.

Having identified all the forces, and having now recognized that the quasi-stationary equilibrium is not so hard to understand once one realizes how "overdetermined" it is, what do we do next?

1) Should one add driving forces? Certainly one way to increase productivity is to escalate supervisory pressures, give

workers more incentives, scare them with more economic data on the disastrous consequences of not working harder, and so on. This is generally easy to do because we usually have more control of the driving forces, but it is NOT a good strategy because in most change situations the more pressure we put on, the more counter-forces we generate, all of which means that the total tension in the system will increase. In labor relations one often sees such a scenario developing until ultimately the system explodes in the form of a strike. In the IT world the equivalent is the sabotage or misuse of expensive and sophisticated systems (Hirschhorn, 1987; Zuboff, 1988).

2) Should one remove restraining forces? Should one build more trust so that workers are more likely to believe management economic projections, or change group norms to reduce the tendency toward restriction of output, or increase job security, and so on? Removing restraining forces is generally harder to do because we have less control over them, but it IS a good strategy because if they can be removed, there are generally enough driving forces in the system already, that the equilibrium will move by itself, and total tension in the system will decrease.

In deciding on which forces to attempt to influence we have to consider our own access to those forces and our ability to manipulate them. For each force thus identified we can draw a new force field to diagnose further what might be involved. For example, if we decide that we want to change the group norms of restriction of output, we can draw a force field of what forces

are already driving in this direction, and what forces are restraining this change. Though this process can be time consuming, it is essential preparation before leaping into action, because premature action is likely to be fruitless in that it is likely to ignore some critical forces that should be considered.

For example, if in the productivity example we push ahead without careful consideration, we might miss the point that the group norms of restriction of output are based on a long history of labor mistrusting management in this company because of things that happened to the grandparents and parents of the present worker group. In other words, the group attitude may be by now a cultural assumption that is so taken for granted that it is virtually an unchangeable force. An entire change program might have to be undertaken just to unfreeze the system around this single force before anything else can be accomplished.

Some Examples of IT Related Force-fields

In a workshop on change dealing with IT, groups of managers and professors familiar with the problems of implementing IT solutions tackled several change problems: the introduction of executive workstations, the use of IT to integrate staff functions, and the introduction of CIM. The force fields developed by the groups (in approximately one to two hours) are shown in Figures 3, 4, and 5.

Insert Figures 3, 4, and 5 about here

What these force fields typically reveal to the change

planners is that some of the restraining forces are very powerful and will be difficult to change. An element of realism is thus introduced into the planning process. Furthermore, the force field allows the change planners to focus more precisely on what exactly they are trying to do. For example, as one scans the restraining forces in Figure 3 on executive workstations, it is easy to see why it is so difficult to install them. Where does one begin, particularly if it has become part of the sub-culture that senior executive's work does not involve such tools?

If, on the other hand, one looks at the driving forces only, it is hard to understand why such workstations have not been implemented all over the place. The force field analysis illustrates graphically how many forces may be acting on both sides, and makes it possible for the change agent to think more clearly about where and how to begin. For example, since there are many possible restraining forces, it may be critical to involve senior executives by means of interviews or committees to determine which of the forces are especially strong and therefore have to be dealt with first.

Similarly, we can notice that the groups found many powerful restraining forces inhibiting the integration of staff functions and the introduction of computer integrated manufacturing systems (CIM). The diagnostic job is not finished with the drawing of these force fields, but it is a good initial road map, especially for the planning group. The tool enables planners to pool and record their insights into the change problem quickly. As a final point it should be noted that in each of the force

fields, subcultural forces appear to be strong, suggesting to the change planner that some cultural changes may have to occur, and those are, of course, much more complicated and time consuming (Schein, 1985).

A force field analysis reveals one aspect of the complexity of the system, but it does not reveal some of the important connections between the parts of the system that may be supporting some of the key forces. Therefore, in addition to the force field analysis one should do some system mapping and role network analysis.

Open Systems Planning

The purpose of this diagnostic tool is to reveal the connections that exist between the target group or social system and its various environments, in order to assess what role those connections play either as driving or restraining forces (Beckhard and Harris, 1987). As part of the assessment of the present state of the target system, we would lay out first the "demand systems," all those stakeholders both inside and outside the organization who make some kinds of demands on it, and the "response systems," all those in the organization who are supposed to respond to these demands and how do they do it.

This kind of analysis, best done by a group familiar with the situation of the target system, is best done visually by drawing on flip charts the actual demand systems and their response systems. Relative potency can then be shown graphically with colored or heavier lines, and the picture allows one to see

the whole force field simultaneously.

Such a picture typically reveals several important facts relevant to the planning of change. First of all, we become aware, as in force field analysis, that any system has many forces acting on it, that it exists in multiple environments, and that its responses to the multiple demands are a complex set of compromises and negotiations among the various priorities.

For example, the CEO demanding that his division managers should adopt executive work stations and the decision support systems that go with them may not be aware of the demands that peers, staff groups, subordinates, suppliers, customers, IT vendors, members of the community, the executive's family, and others are already making, and that many of those demands are incompatible or produce severe cognitive overload. When executives say they do not have time to learn a new system, we need to understand this in the context of the overload that they may be experiencing, not dismiss it as an excuse hiding other feelings.

The picture of the demand system can be elaborated by now sketching in how we would like that system to look at some time in the future. What do we want to respond to, and how do we then create the right response systems. For example, we might show technological forces as one of the demand systems and note that the only response the organization has is the data processing department's monitoring of technological developments. But the internal power of this department may be so weak that information dies there. An ideal future state might be a DP unit that becomes internally a powerful demand systems to which line

management responds constructively. That, in turn, might reveal that the DP unit itself needs to undergo changes to make it more influential and credible.

In other words the mapping process reveals where connections need to be weakened and strengthened, and where new change targets have to be dealt with if the overall change project is to work. The project becomes differentiated and more realistic as the complexity of the social system is increasingly revealed. This complexity also explains why change programs take so long, sometimes as much as 10 to 20 years. Each sub-system with its own sub-culture must go through all the stages of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. Successfully changing one sub-system does not guarantee at all that the systems it is connected to will automatically change. Only with repeated efforts to induce change in every part of the total system can lasting efforts be achieved, and that takes enormous time, commitment, and energy.

Role Mapping

Role mapping (Kahn et al, 1964) can be viewed as an extension and refinement of open systems planning, in that it focuses more precisely on a specific change target, a group or manager, and then defines what are for that person or group the relevant "role senders," those people or groups who have specific expectations of him or the group. The target is put into the center of the diagram and all possible senders are identified--boss, peers, subordinates, friends, family, community members, etc. etc. For each sender some effort is made to identify

specifically what that sender expects, and the total set of expectations is then examined for evidence of three kinds of problems:

- 1) Role overload: the sum total of what is expected of the target exceeds what the target could ever do.
- 2) Role ambiguity: some role senders are not clear or send mixed signals, so that the target is not sure what is expected vis-a-vis those senders.
- 3) Role conflict: some of the expectations are in direct conflict with each other, requiring the target to decide whose expectations will be responded to.

Role occupants of course have their own expectations of themselves and are thus role senders as well. So one of the commonest reasons for overload, ambiguity, and conflict is our own expectations of ourselves. We may expect too much of ourselves, or may not be clear what we think we should be doing, or may find that what others expect of us is in conflict with some of our own values and standards. Ethical and moral issues can often be best understood in terms of conflicts between role senders, especially when one of them is oneself (Schein, 1966).

Once one has identified the role network and its characteristics, one can examine it for evidence of 1) where there might be unusual sources of resistance to change (i.e. some powerful role sender who expects something totally different from what the change agent would like the target to do), or 2) where there might already be some energy for change (i.e. where some

role senders already want the target person or group to move in the same direction as the change agent does, or where others have already unfrozen the target).

Because unfreezing is so difficult and time consuming, the location of forces that have already partially unfrozen the target is probably one of the most powerful change tactics. In other words, the change agent can hook on to energy that is already in the system rather than having to inject the motivation himself or herself. Locating where there is energy for change becomes a major priority.

Open systems planning and role mapping together reveal the connections between the various sub-systems and thus make it clear how the change program must be designed, how long it might take, and what kind of energy will be required to produce changes in all of the parts involved. Having done all of this diagnosing, how does the change agent decide to take some action?

Selecting First Steps

Most of what has been described so far goes on in a planning mode, without the change agent needing to be involved in any way with members of the target system other than the ones helping him or her do the diagnostic planning. Going through the above exercises is a way of making sure that one understands the full complexity of what one is embarking on, and deals with it realistically. But inevitably, the diagnostic work will reveal gaps in knowledge or will suggest new targets or avenues of action to consider.

It is important to view any initial step that the change agent takes as an opportunity to begin the change process itself. And it is a fundamental principle of working with human systems that any contact with the system is an intervention, even if the intent is only diagnostic (Schein, 1987, 1988).

Even if the change agent only asks a few questions for information, those questions guide the respondent's thinking, focus attention on certain issues, indicate that somebody is interested in those issues, and in other ways produce unknown amounts of influence. Consequently, if influence is inevitable, one might as well influence as much in the direction of the planned change goals as possible. This line of thinking then should define for the change agent both whom he or she decides to talk to, and how the conversation is to be framed.

Criteria for initial intervention target

Change theorists have identified five useful criteria for deciding whom to approach first:

1) Accessibility: One should select as an initial target persons to whom one has access. The change agent might decide that a most useful initial target and source of information would be the Chairman of the Board, but that person might be totally inaccessible.

2) Leverage: Assuming that the person is accessible, the change agent must ask "How much leverage do I have with this person? Do I have enough credibility to be taken seriously? Will I be able to influence this person?"

3) Vulnerability: If I have access and leverage, I still

have to be sure that the target I have chosen is vulnerable to change. I might totally waste my time if I encounter someone so set in his or her ways that talking to them would be pointless.

4) Appropriateness: If I have access, leverage, and believe the target is vulnerable to change, I still have to ask how appropriate is it, given my understanding of the total system to initiate this change. Suppose I do get to the Chairman of the Board and ask some questions about executive decision support systems and their use in his company. Do I believe it is ethically and otherwise appropriate for me to influence him to think about these matters?

5) Linkage: Finally, if I am comfortable with all of the above criteria, I still have to ask what my target person's linkage is to the rest of the system. Suppose, for example that this Chairman is a lame duck who has lost all influence in the company. My changing him then would have relatively little impact on the rest of the system. If I want that influence I should be talking to people whose linkage is such that they will proliferate whatever new ideas come from our joint interaction.

In most situations, we will face many choices of where to start and will have to do a complex mental calculus around the five criteria identified. One cannot always maximize all of the criteria, but it is important to know when one decides to approach this or that person, what one is gaining and what one is giving up. One should not start crashing around asking questions without some conscious plan.

Process Consultation as an Intervention Model

In my experience the best way to approach any diagnostic situation is to view it as an intervention and to judge the appropriateness of that intervention in terms of the criteria that should guide any clinical or consulting process (Schein, 1987, 1988). Whether one is an outside professional or an inside manager, it is my assumption that interventions work best when one considers fully the needs of the client/target, and attempts as best one can to be helpful at all times.

From the point of view of process consultation as a philosophy of how to be most helpful as well as influential, it is essential that the client/target be involved in the diagnostic process and maintain ownership of whatever part of the problem is his or hers. To illustrate with the example of the CEO "imposing" executive work stations on his subordinates, it is my belief that this process will work best if the CEO first creates a problem for the subordinates by stating that he will now work in a different way, something that is his prerogative (disconfirmation). Having said that and thereby started to unfreeze the system, the CEO should now help the subordinates to own and solve the problem (provide psychological safety).

This can be done by inquiring what they propose to do about getting themselves up to speed in using a system compatible with his, or he can ask them what help they want from him in getting hooked into the system, or he can ask what problems this might create for them and how they could best be overcome, or he can point out how others have solved the problem (encourage

scanning and identification).

What all of these tactics have in common is that once the direction of the change is clear, the change agent should help achieve that direction, not to use pressure tactics or coercion. And the best way to help at this point is to get very client/target oriented, sympathetic to their resistances, and ready to be involved with their problems as they see them. For example, as the CEO I can say sympathetically to my key subordinates: "I know that your managerial style is different and that the use of the work station may not be how you do things, but I do need to use this tool and I find it very helpful, so I am asking you to learn how to use it because I need your help and am therefore willing to help you in any way I can. Tell me what problems you have with it and I will try to help you with them."

What must be avoided is the power message "do it because I am the boss and it will be good for you." Most people in organizational life know how to subvert and sabotage orders of this sort, but will be very responsive to a boss or change agent who needs help and is willing to help in turn.

What the change agent must mentally achieve at this point is a "spirit of inquiry" (Bennis, 1962), a willingness and ability to listen to how the world really looks from the perspective of the respondent. If that respondent is a change target, it is especially important to be able to be empathic in order to create the necessary psychological safety for the change to occur.

For example, the CEO who really listens may discover

that one of his subordinates really is hiding the fact that he would be embarrassed to reveal to any trainer how little he is able to understand the rudiments of a keyboard and a workstation. Maybe he doesn't even know how to spell and can hide that lack by always dictating his letters. Having to learn to type would reveal the hidden flaw, something that the person will avoid at all costs. If that is the source of the resistance, the CEO might well choose to compromise and agree to let that individual work through his secretary. Each subordinate might have a different reason for resistance and the smart CEO change agent will deal with each one sympathetically as a problem to be solved.

What the change agent must avoid at all costs is to get angry at resistance, sabotage, or subversion. Assume that there is a good reason and maintain a spirit of inquiry to find out what the reason is and how it might best be dealt with. Each subordinate might be told that having to interact with the CEO on the system is indeed non-negotiable, but how each subordinate does it, might be highly negotiable as long as it gets done within whatever time frame makes sense.

To put the matter another way, if the change agent is an "outsider," maybe a DP consultant working this problem, he or she can take a comparable approach by saying to a given manager "It appears that your boss has decided to use this system and will want to communicate with you on it. That seems to be a given. Now how can I be most helpful to you in figuring out how you can best get yourself into position to work with your boss on it?"

The common finding from IT implementation projects that they work best when the ultimate users are involved in the design of the system is understandable from this point of view. Only the users, the change targets, fully understand their own situation, and it is the task of the change agent, consultant, system designer to create a dialogue that permits the clients to fully express themselves and their needs. Resistance to change can be overcome if people have the feeling their concerns are being heard, and that their needs are being taken into account.

The Change Process in Perspective

All of the processes and tools described above will be used in a given project, most of them simultaneously. It is desirable at the beginning of the change project to take the time to do as much diagnostic work as possible without involving the client, so that the initial interventions can be made in the most helpful way, but often the change agent must involve the client in order to get the most basic kind of diagnostic information.

Again, Kurt Lewin in his wisdom had it right. He said "in order to understand a system you should try to change it." The implication is that one cannot fully understand all of the forces acting until one elicits some of them. So in any given change project one constantly recycles through diagnostic and intervention processes, enriching one's understanding with each cycle. And one constantly should re-ask the fundamental questions: Why change? How appropriate is this change? Am I approaching it in the right way? What do I need to do different-

ly based on what I learned in the last round?

Even if the change is being induced from a position of power, it is essential for the change agent to learn the even greater power of being helpful and supportive. People must be unfrozen to change, they must hurt somewhere. But that is not enough. Equally important is their sense of psychological safety that it is OK to try something new, to give up something old and familiar. The smart change agent will make his targets feel secure. Only then will their resistance genuinely give way.

References

Beckhard, R. & Harris, R. T. Organizational Transitions (2d ed.): Managing Complex Change. Reading, Ma.: Addison-Wesley, 1987.

Bennis, W. G. Toward a truly scientific management: The concept of organizational health. General Systems Yearbook, 1962, 7, 269-282.

Hirschhorn, L. The Workplace Within. Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 1987.

Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D. M., Quinn, R. P., Snoek, J. D., & Rosenthal, R. A. Organizational Stress: Studies in Role Conflict and ambiguity. N.Y.: Wiley, 1964.

Lewin, K. "Group decision and social change." In G. E. Swanson, T.N. Newcomb, & E. L. Hartley (Eds.) Readings in Social Psychology Rev. Ed. N.Y.: Holt, 1952.

Schein, E. H. The problem of moral education for the business manager. Industrial Management Review, 1966, 8, 3-14.

Schein, E. H. Professional Education: Some New Directions. N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1972.

Schein, E. H. Organizational Culture and Leadership. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985.

Schein, E. H. Process Consultation Vol. 2: Lessons for Managers and Consultants. Reading, Ma.: Addison-Wesley, 1987.

Schein, E. H. Process Consultation Vol. 1 (Rev.): It's Role in Organization Development. Reading, Ma.: Addison-Wesley, 1988.

Zuboff, S. In the Age of the Smart Machine. N.Y.: Basic, 1988.

Table 1

A Model of Planned Change

Unfreezing: *Creating motivation to change*

Disconfirmation

Guilt / anxiety

Psychological safety

Changing: *Creating new beliefs, values, behavior*

Identification, imitation

Scanning, trial and error

Refreezing: *Stabilizing the changes*

Integration into personality

Integration into key relationships

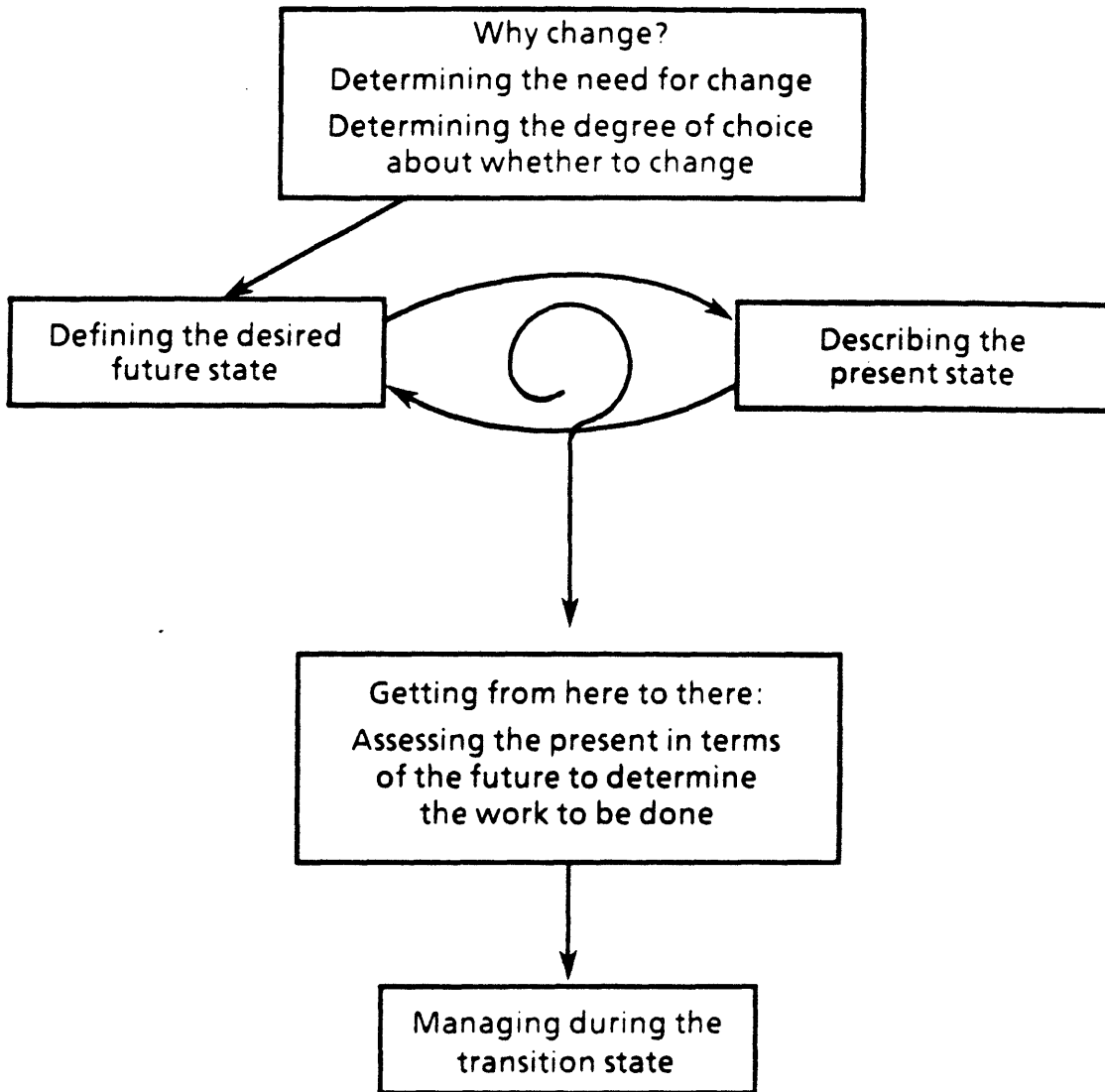
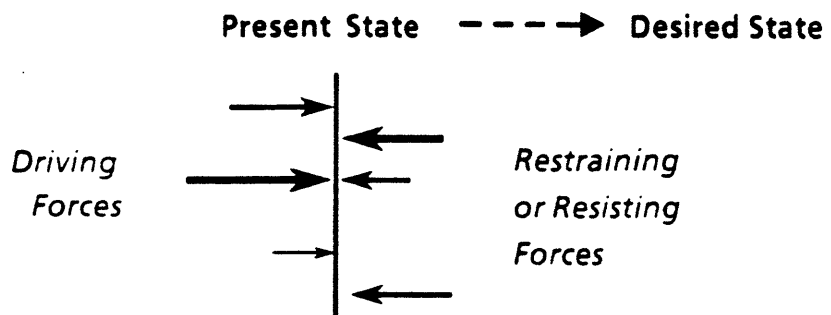


Figure 1
A Map of the Change Management Process
Beckhard & Harris, 1987



Categories of Forces

Technological
Economic
Political
Socio-cultural

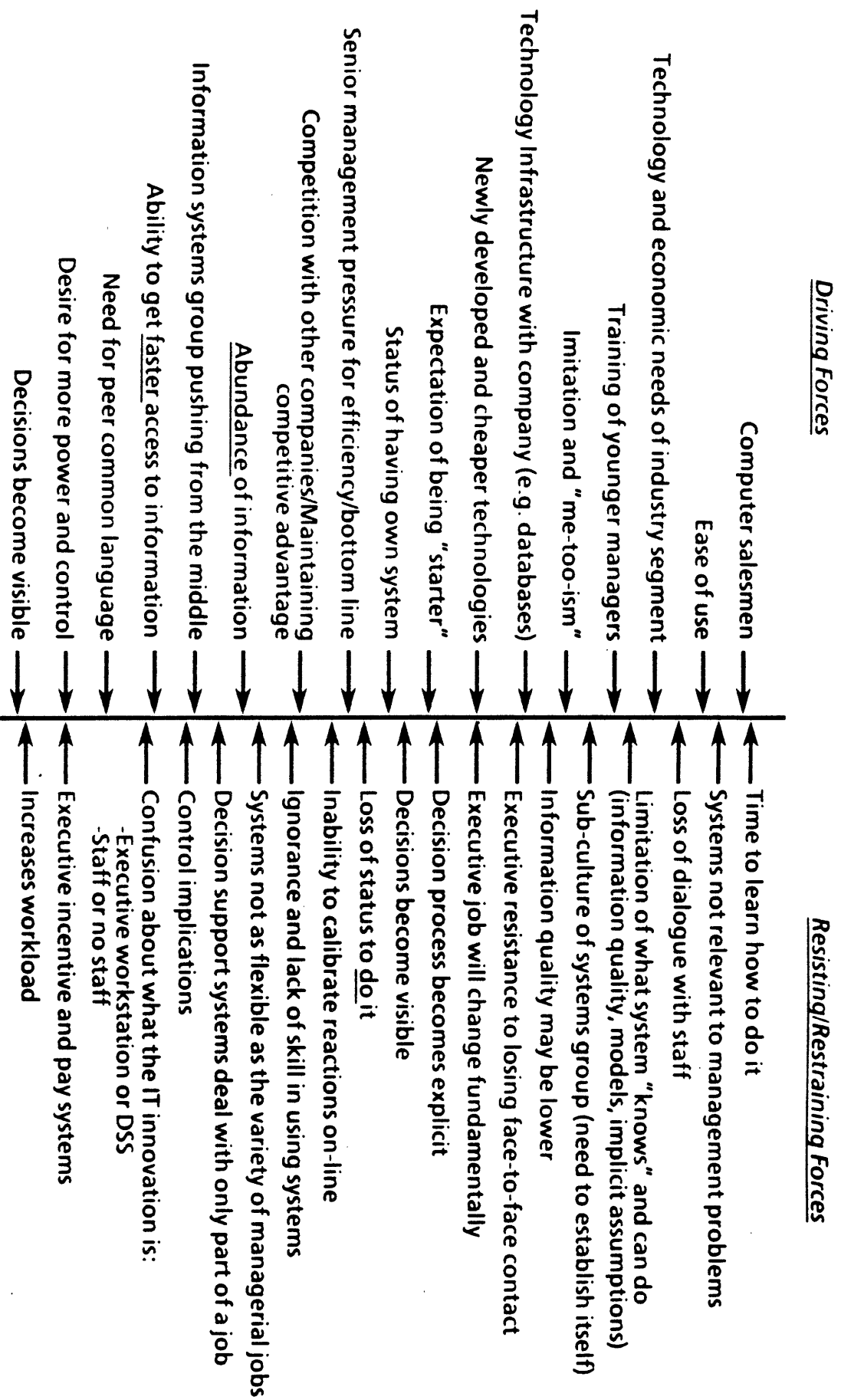
Organizational
Policy
Structural

Group
Interpersonal

Individual/Personal

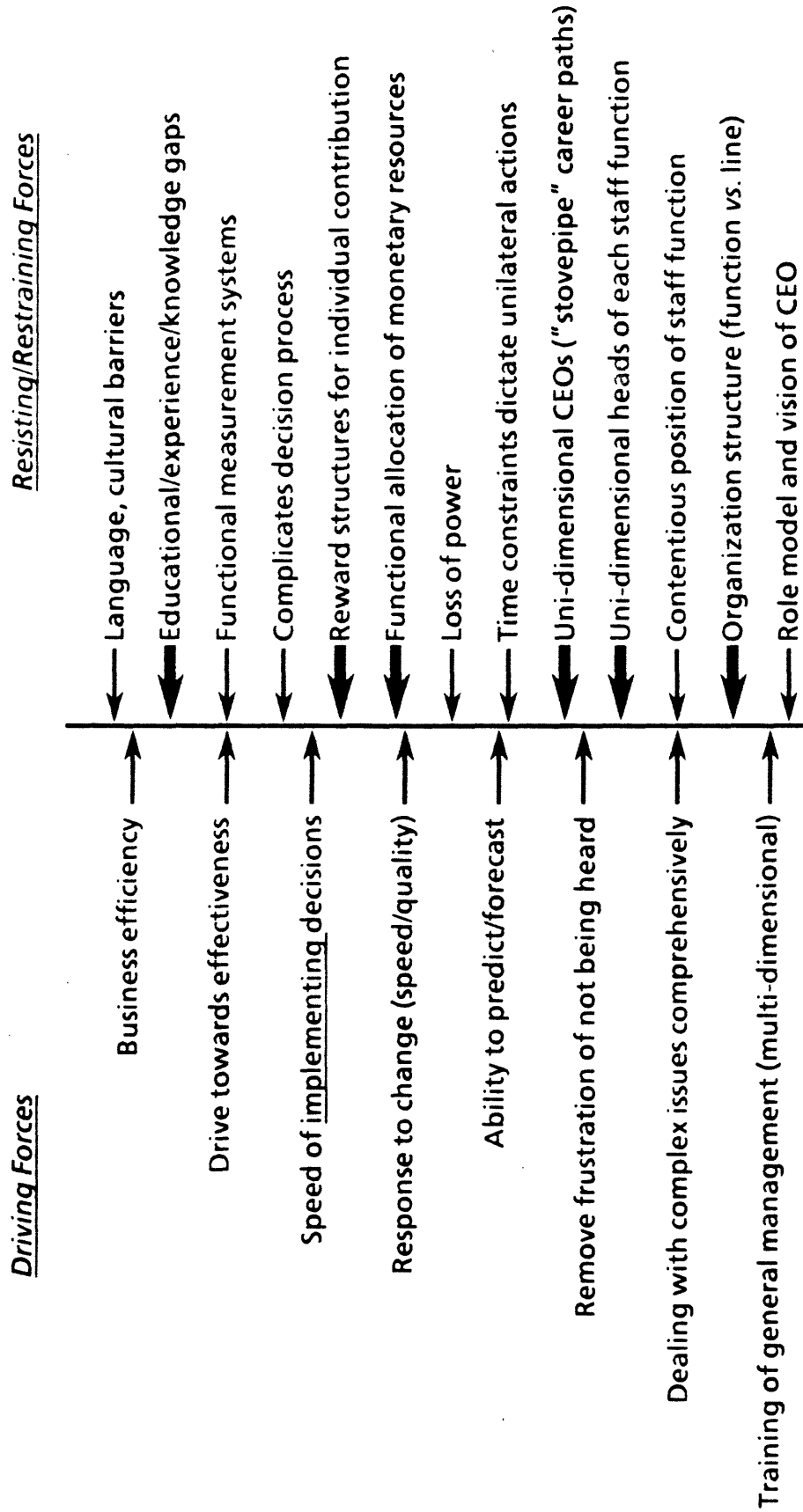
Figure 2
Force-Field Analysis

Figure 3
Force-Field -- Executive Workstations



Force-Field -- Integration of Staff Functions

Figure 4



Force-Field -- Computer Integrated Manufacturing (CIM)

Figure 5

