Preface

The work for this book began a little over a decade ago, in the late 1990s, when, as members of a W. K. Kellogg Foundation–funded research consortium, my colleagues and I grappled with the particulars of making change—and more broadly, transformation—happen in organizations. Our discussions and research efforts ranged from the mundane to the deeply philosophical (read: What exactly is the difference between change and transformation, and do we really care?). Our group, a blended mix of practitioners and scholars, examined and wrestled with real unfolding change initiatives as a means to generate meaning and understand how ordinary people, in practice, make organizational change happen. Through this work, I became fascinated with the phenomenon of resistance to change efforts. Subsequently, two questions emerged as the key focus areas for my independent research efforts. (1) How do organizational leaders plan for and execute change initiatives? And more specifically: (2) How do change champions experience and successfully work through resistance as they make organizational change happen?

As our conversations progressed, we took a long walk through the literature to discover what others had said about organizational change and transformation. There is a great deal of writing around planning and implementation; and universities even offer certificate programs in project management and degrees in organizational development. Many authors espouse ideas about the different steps and stages that change entails or requires. There is no shortage of books proclaiming that one recipe or another is the "right" way for executives or champions to plan for change. Yet many warn that the incremental, stepwise strategies that have been accepted for decades are long past their prime (Alfred

and Carter, 1993; Burke, 2008; Cawsey and Deszca, 2007; Collins and Hill, 1998; Hamel and Prahalad, 1994; Presley and Leslie, 1999; Quinn, 1996). Still, to the date of this writing in 2010, the various models used in practice have been inadequate for empirically validating the emerging frameworks, particularly those that attempt to fully explain resistance (Furst and Cable, 2008; Goltz and Hietapelto, 2002).

The convergence of market forces is increasing the speed with which change must take place (Calabrese, 2003; Champy and Nohria, 1996; Duderstadt, 2000; Gumport and Pusser, 1997). Even though several helpful books have addressed the subject of organizational change since the turn of this century (e.g., Burke, 2008; Burke, Lake, and Paine, 2009; de Caluwé and Vermaak, 2003; and Demers, 2007), the existing empirical research on change, transformation— and resistance in particular—poses numerous problems. The literature is thick with practitioner-centric cookbooks and articles offering recipes for fostering change within single organizations. But the number of empirical pieces related to change, transformation strategy, and resistance in general is razor thin (Dunphy and Griffiths, 1994; Hearn, 1988; Klimecki and Lassleben, 1998; Piterit, 2000; Presley and Leslie, 1999; Sporn, 1999; Young 2000). There are three further weaknesses in the literature.

First, an encompassing and empirically based theory explaining transformation is missing from all fields reviewed (e.g., higher education; organizational behavior, change, and transformation; and business) (Dunphy and Griffiths, 1994; Eckel, 2000). Despite the importance of understanding the theoretical and practical implications of organizational transformation processes, macro-institutional change has not been fully explored, theories not fully specified, and frameworks not integrated (Demers, 2007; Sastry, 1997). While numerous models accounting for incremental and radical organizational change are offered, little theory explains why one theory or model applies rather than another or how the process of transformation proceeds within organizations (Newman and Nollen, 1998).

Second, much of the literature is anecdotal, based on first-person accounts or single-organization case studies (Galpin, 1996; Guskin and Bassis, 1985). Wading into the large collection of consultant-authored books and articles, one notices that the literature has a practitioner focus (e.g., Ashkenas, Ulrich, Jick, and Kerr, 1995; Brill and Worth, 1997; Cawsey and Deszca, 2007). Wary change agents are deeply familiar with trendy change techniques such as Hammer and Champy's (1993) "reengineering," and recognize the danger of applying

superficial management fads (Axelrod, 2002; Day, 1998; Nadler, 1998). Hamel (2000, 20) warns that "consultants, self-proclaimed gurus, and left-brain planners" have no real answers and no idea where new strategies and approaches to change should come from. In addition, it is difficult to obtain widely applicable results from single-organization case studies and first-person accounts (Merriam, 2002; Yin, 1993 and 1994). Burke (2008) goes further, identifying a paradox in the change literature: although change processes are rarely linear, the models used to describe them are typically presented in a linear fashion. Many describe the eight steps or six stages of change, but neglect to tell you what to do when things explode at step four (Burke, 2008; Cawsey and Deszca, 2007).

Last, there are very few articles or books that empirically explore the phenomenon of resistance to organizational transformation. Much of what we know about resistance to change efforts is anecdotal or theoretical, and is relegated to a chapter or less in related books. Although numerous authors address resistance to change in small sections of articles or books, two foundational works address resistance directly: specifically, Hultman (1998) and Judson (1966). However insightful, both are practitioner-authored books written from the authors' personal experiences in lengthy consulting careers. Since then, there has been almost no empirical support for strategy and approaches to surmounting resistance (some exceptions include: Fletcher, 1990; Furst and Cable, 2008; Macri, Tagliaventi, and Bertolotti, 2002; Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence, 1997).

In conducting the study that serves as the foundation for this book, I set out to add some empirical understanding to the mix of existing literature on the subject. Certainly not all change efforts are resisted, but many practitioners understand intuitively that change agents (or champions) almost universally experience resistance to organizational change and transformation (Backer and Porterfield, 1998; Burke, 2008; Cameron and Ulrich, 1986; de Caluwé and Vermaak, 2003; Hermon-Taylor, 1985; Likert, 1961). While the roots of resistance—power, emotion, control, and vulnerability—are comprehensible (see Geller, 2002; Goltz and Hietapelto, 2002; and Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003), resistance is easily camouflaged and can asphyxiate strategic change efforts (Cheldelin, 2000). To fully realize transformation, change agents must identify sources of resistance, engage them, and defeat them—or more positively, surmount the resistance (Ford, Ford, and D'Amelio, 2008). Given the turbulence caused by forces pushing for change and the ubiquity of resistance to organizational transformation (Stanley, Meyer, and Topolnytsky,

2005), my study was designed to discover and examine how ordinary people become successful change agents. Specifically: *How do change champions engage and surmount resistance to successfully initiate and accomplish organizational transformation?*

Methodological Foundation

When there is an obvious shortage of empirically based work on a subject, the methodology literature is explicit. Qualitative methods must be deployed before anyone can even think about using quantitative measures to test a theory (Creswell, 2009). Because there has been, at least to this point, no empirically tested theory in the literature that fully explains resistance to change (Goltz and Hietapelto, 2002; Young, 2000), studies must use valid qualitative methods to collect data and thorough analysis to extrapolate and explain the related phenomena (Bryan, 2006). In-depth case analysis can be an invaluable tool in this effort (Waddell and Sohal, 1998). This book, therefore, is based on two studies I conducted using a modified grounded-theory approach (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The following paragraphs offer an overview of the methodology I used to establish the empirical backbone that supports this book. It is my hope that this initial work will open up several veins of research that yield robust quantitative studies.

Because my research mission was to critically examine resistance behavior and "championship" (the act of championing or advocating), I needed to identify organizations that had recently experienced a major change or were in the process of making transformation happen. All of the institutions I considered had reported instances of resistance. Although it is possible to learn from failure, I intentionally set aside institutions where change efforts failed in order to examine the efforts of ordinary people who succeeded.

To leverage triangulation (Yin, 1994), I collected multiple types of data from numerous sources: (1) internal and external reports and studies related to the specific transformations, including strategy and planning documents; (2) all iterations of mission and vision statements published during the time of the transformation; (3) minutes of trustee meetings; (4) minutes from related committee, task force, senate, and presidential meetings; (5) needs-assessment and evaluative documents (including accreditation and external consultant reports); and (6) press releases and news clippings. I referred to historical documents, including: (1) published histories of each institution; (2) institutional charters; (3) event histories pertaining to the planning and rollout phases; and

(4) responses to requests for proposals (RFPs) and project progress reports distributed to funding agencies. I collected institutional data spanning the time of the transformation from: (1) annual reports; (2) college catalogues; (3) admissions and enrollment reports; (4) fundraising and foundation documents; (5) annual financial reports; and (6) organizational charts.

I conducted interviews using a semi-structured technique that encouraged informants to illustrate the key elements of the transformation processes, identify the forms of resistance they experienced, and describe the approaches that were successful in engaging and surmounting that resistance (see Appendix C). A pilot study was conducted to test the protocol, and the results were used to refine the questionnaire deployed in the full-blown research effort. I conducted, recorded, and analyzed a total of close to seventy interviews, each lasting over 1.5 hours and resulting in hundreds of pages of transcribed material.

Many qualitative theorists believe that the closer the researcher is to the raw data, the better the analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1999). Having conducted, recorded, and transcribed all of the interviews personally, I agree. It helps to be intimately connected with the data. Once loaded into a software package (I used QSR's NVivo), the transcribed interview data, field notes, and documents contain the contextual resins that fix meaning to the whole analytical process. A more clinical approach, in which researchers get their first brush with the data only after it has been collected, may be "scientific" but does not communicate nuances of tone and tenor. Particularly difficult to comprehend are complex idioms that are meant to convey irony, sarcasm, and strength of conviction and intent when one must simply analyze transcribed texts.

Broadly speaking, qualitative methods are about allowing the data to speak through documents, notes, journals, and interview transcriptions (Creswell, 2009). My synthesis and interpretation of the data began at the onset of data collection (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 1994; Merriam, 1988). A systematic method of collecting and organizing the data in a sequential format facilitated my development of the initial case descriptions. I was able to identify and describe patterns in the data through pattern matching, explanation building, and developing logic models (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 1994).

Utilizing the tools provided by the grounded-theory analysis process, I coded the interviews according to the ideas conveyed in each statement, asking: (a) What is really going on here? and (b) Can I explain what I think I am seeing? (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The first piece of this microanalysis involved open coding designed to examine the fine-grain detail of the data. I asked questions

like, "What is this person saying here?," "Why is this person saying this?," and "What is the range of potential meanings of each sentence?" Individual sentences and groups of sentences that captured a particular idea or the essence of each interviewee's comments were bracketed (Creswell, 2009). These groups of texts were categorized. *In vivo* codes were used as labels for each category when appropriate. I compared, conceptualized, and categorized incidents, events, and activities until saturation was achieved (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2009).

Next, I used axial coding techniques to examine the major open-coding categories, creating appropriate subcategories. The context and conceptualizations began to take shape through "questions such as why or how come, where, when, how and with what results." The answers "uncovered relationships among categories" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, 127). At that point I looked for conditions of causality or intervention that, when combined or interwoven, explained the phenomenon. Eventually, it became obvious how subcategories were connected via conceptual threads.

The final step in the analysis was the selective coding of the data for each institution (Creswell, 2009). Although there were many cases of resistance at each institution, I selected three from each to portray in this book's chapters. They richly describe many of the salient properties and dimensions of resistance and championship. Even though only six cases of resistance and engagement are illustrated in detail here, I included all of the identified instances of resistance in the analysis to give each category greater precision and strengthen the explanatory power of the results (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). I then wove the resistance and engagement phenomena together with the transformation narratives to develop a theoretical foundation for understanding them. What emerges from this comparative case analysis using the grounded-theory approach is a robust illustration of how ordinary people champion change and successfully move through the resistance they confront.

Readers should be aware of two factors that affected my research. First, as mentioned above, the studies that are the foundation for this book are based on proven *qualitative* research methods. When I began the studies that undergird this work, there were no empirical works available from which to expand the theoretical constructs with a quantitative approach. Because of this, the qualitative approach made the most sense. Second, the two settings for my study are a college and a university. Unlike in business settings, where profit and loss are powerful drivers of change, in a college, profit is almost completely absent as a motivator. College and university campuses may therefore well be the perfect

locations to study resistance to change in its purest form. Without the overlay of profit and loss, individual and group acts of resistance to change are not easily deflated, making them more plain, visible, and robust. Likewise, change champions must deploy tools other than monetary arguments. Thus the findings herein may particularly assist those who would champion change in organizations or other settings where money is not, or is no longer, a relevant driver.

Definitions

Some researchers use small details to differentiate terms such as strategy, strategic thinking, and strategic planning (see Mintzberg and Quinn, 1996). Others use terms broadly, effectively blurring distinctions between concepts (e.g., between change and transformation). I hope that the following definitions of terms as I use them in this book will help to prevent confusion and provide clarity.

Organizational Change and Transformation

Transformation is akin to radical change, a step below full-blown metamorphosis, where the underlying assumptions about the functions of an organization—how it should operate and conduct business, its core values, strategies, structures, and capabilities—are modified to produce an organization that is fundamentally different from its predecessor (Cameron and Ulrich, 1986; Fletcher, 1990; Newman and Nollen, 1998). **Change** is the alteration of a portion or subset of an organization; it may or may not be embedded in or related to a transformation effort (Beckhard and Pritchard, 1992; Bergquist, 1993; Owens and Steinhoff, 1976; Rowley, et al., 1997). To be more precise, to **change** a process or subset of an organization is to alter, modify, or replace it such that the end result is at least in part different from the original. The **transformation** of a large and complex segment of an organization or of a complete institution is the wholesale revision, augmentation, or replacement of all of its pieces such that the end result is fundamentally and measurably different from the original. Transformation alters the culture of the organization by changing underlying assumptions and institutional behaviors, processes, and products; it is deep and pervasive, affecting the whole organization (Eckel, Hill, and Green, 1998).

Organizational change can be thought of as a continuum along which the effort expended will increase in direct proportion to the scope of change (see Exhibit 1) (Burke, 2008). Certainly, changing pieces of an organization does not entail as much work as transformation, which involves the whole of an organization—its parts, their relationship with each other, and the surrounding
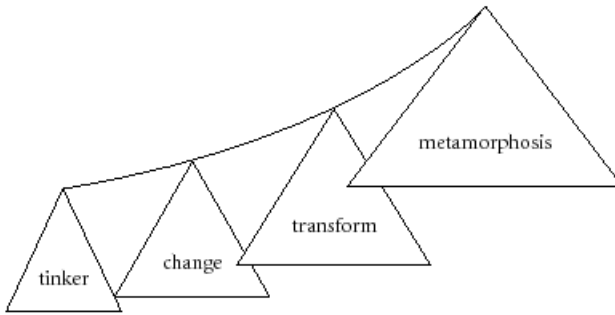
Exhibit 1. Change on a continuum.

environment (Beckhard and Pritchard, 1992). No one will particularly mind if you tinker with routines that involve your daily work pattern. Change may only involve, say, revising a memorandum of understanding between you and your suppliers that produces a different product flow through your supply chain. This is substantially less challenging than trying to effect a transformation, one on the scale of Hewlett-Packard's acquisition of Compaq, for example (certainly from the perspective of those in the Compaq organization). This book does not address metamorphosis, as this involves a complete and wholesale change of an entire operation such that, while the DNA may be similar, outwardly the resulting agency looks nothing like the original (much like the degree of difference between a caterpillar and a butterfly).

Engaging Resistance

The phrase **engaging resistance** is not commonly used in the reviewed literature. Given the sweeping literature-based assumption that transformation efforts naturally produce resistance, agents pushing a transformation agenda will necessarily encounter and need to engage some form of resistance (Judson, 1966). This is not to suggest that all change breeds resistance (Burke, 2008). Tinkering in areas that will have a minimal effect on the whole organization may barely warrant the attention of a sentence in the corporate newsletter.

Although an appropriate dictionary definition of engagement is somewhat violent, the imagery may seem apropos: engagement is "to be involved in battle or conflict." (A more benign and positive image of engagement can be derived from two people betrothed.) By *engagement* I mean acknowledging the existence of resistance and working to surmount it by addressing the resisters and

the resistance behavior. I use the word "engagement" because other words, such as "mitigate," suggest that the action has a particular outcome. Whereas the act of engagement may involve minimizing resistance, it can also include the act of embracing resisters, or ignoring them. The action taken to engage resistance can be one or a combination of behaviors based on the sense each champion makes of his or her experience (Weick, 1995). As will become clearer in the later chapters, the more neutral term "engagement" suggests that we think of resistance not always as negative, but as something that could be placed on a continuum of responses to change, from positive to negative (Burke, 2008; de Caluwé and Vermaak, 2003; Piderit, 2000).

Overview

To begin this book, I develop the platform for unveiling the results and discussing my findings by telling the transformation stories of two real organizations. Portland State University and Olivet College were two of the institutions involved in the initial W. K. Kellogg Foundation study mentioned earlier. Both organizations undertook serious, wholesale transformations of their respective general education curriculums over almost exactly the same ten-year period. Through the W. K. Kellogg Foundation project, I gained access to many of the ordinary people involved on both sides of the effort—resisters and champions alike. These two organizations are on almost opposite ends of the continuum of higher education institutions in terms of context and organizational complexity, a fact that strengthens my claim that the findings were derived from an analysis of data gathered in a robust way and are therefore empirically valid. More specifically, in qualitative research, conclusions that are drawn across qualitatively different organizations strengthen the validity of the work (Creswell, 2009). If you examine the websites of both these institutions, you will find them to be dramatically different.

In Chapter 1, I establish the framework and foundation of the study by beginning the transformation narratives at both institutions. These stories are real; names have not been changed. Almost 100 percent of the participants in this study gave me permission to share their names and details. In the rare instances that informants did not give me permission to use their names or specifics, they did give permission to use their data for research and analysis purposes. In the text I identify most of the people I quote by name or position; if a quotation appears without attribution, it is because that person chose to remain anonymous." Even so, the work has not been sanitized. The stories of

these ordinary people, both named and anonymous, as they championed difficult change efforts are just as compelling as the findings and conclusions.

In Chapter 2, I examine the theoretical backdrop for what we know about change and resistance. I also refer to a smaller preliminary study I conducted as an exploration of the act of change agency, in which I interviewed several leaders of a small liberal arts college as it worked to convert from college to university. This study allowed me to identify a previously unrecognized pattern of behavior related to change agency and raised deeper questions that evolved into the larger study that produced this book. The main emphasis of Chapter 2 is on building a theoretical framework for understanding transformation that includes resistance.

In Chapter 3, I expand the narratives to encompass the change actions taken by the people leading change at Olivet College and Portland State University. The reader will see clearly how resistance and change agency are interwoven. When ordinary people decide to make change happen, their championship behaviors permeate their daily existence, and advocacy of those changes becomes their prime directive. Events do not always take place in a logical or chronological order, but often occur simultaneously (Burke, 2008). Change can be messy, but laying out the story chronologically helps to clarify the realities facing both organizations.

In Chapter 4, I explain my findings on the nature of resistance. I do this before unpacking the six specific cases of resistance at Olivet and Portland State in order to provide a foundation for understanding both the forms of and the rationale for resistance. The bulk of Chapter 4 leans heavily on the findings that triangulate from the data gathered at both institutions. So armed, readers should be able to identify the sources, forms, and targets of resistance as they occurred.

In Chapter 5, I end the saga of the transformations at Olivet and Portland State by presenting six specific cases of resistance, three from each institution. These were not the only cases of resistance that occurred at either college. In fact, there were many, but those presented herein best illustrate the main forms of resistance and engagement behavior. These stories represent how ordinary people improvised as they responded to the ever-changing conditions that constitute organizational life. From these cases, a pattern of interactivity among and between resisters and change champions emerges.

In Chapter 6, I present 13 types of engagement behavior that, when juxtaposed with the 10 forms of resistance, shape the nature of engagement behavior

over time. I offer a framework for three periods of engagement that defines a new model that can be applied to all types of organizations—not only colleges and universities. Finally, I introduce two phenomena I label "positive pull" and "negative bounce." These concepts are conceptually simple, but because they were not formal results of the study, I present them only as interesting phenomena rather than concrete findings.

In Chapter 7, I conclude the book by drawing lessons about resistance and engagement behavior that change champions can use in their own organizations. I also identify several directions for future research. Besides advancing the scholarship on these subjects the goal of this work is to inform the efforts of ordinary people who are trying to make powerful, positive change happen in their spheres of control.

Although this book is organized in what seems to me a logical order, readers should not feel compelled to read it in the order it is presented. Scholars or students of organizational behavior, change, or development may find the preface and the even-numbered chapters most compelling. Practitioners may wish to start with the narrative case presentations in the odd-numbered chapters. Regardless of the approach you take as a reader, as Weick would suggest, there is no substitute for wading in to see what sense you make of it.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the many people who willingly participated in this study. The contributions of all of them, both named and unnamed, amplify its value. Both champions and resisters, ordinary people all, rose up in a time of turmoil to play an important role in improving their organizations. I am grateful to the Olivet College and Portland State University communities for allowing their stories to be told, and I hope their telling will assist others who are working on improving their own organizations.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the scholars who laid a foundation for my work. In particular, four members of the University of Michigan faculty supported my earlier work and encouraged me to press on. Marvin Peterson offered ongoing and steady guidance and sage advice. Jane Dutton kept me focused on the positive, and by sharing some of her earlier work on Positive Organizational Scholarship, inadvertently helped me frame my research. Kim Cameron's perspective was instrumental in my decision to keep the work whole rather than dissect it for submission to various scholarly journals. Finally, John Burkhardt was my main point of contact with the Kellogg

Foundation, which led me to Olivet College and Portland State University. His steadfast practitioner-centered viewpoint kept my empirical ambitions honest.

Last, I would like to thank the good people connected with Stanford University Press. In particular, I thank acquisitions editor Margo Beth Crouppen. In our many conversations her perspective and insights, as well as her editorial suggestions, were clear and spot on. Likewise, the honest perspectives of the peer reviewers strengthened the work in many ways. To those who wish to remain anonymous, I thank you for your time and attention. It is an honor to be considered a colleague.

As many authors before me have stipulated, notwithstanding all of the feedback and input that helped improve this work, it is my own. And despite all good intentions and effort, no work is perfect. This book is no exception. I accept full responsibility for all content herein and any errors.

A Tribute

In early November 2009, academia lost a fine scholar in Eric Dey, who passed away suddenly. His death was a shock to all who knew him, as Eric was not only young, but also a vibrant academic, a gifted teacher, and a great friend. His academic accomplishments were many and varied. For me personally, and for many of his other former students turned colleagues, he was an always encouraging and positive mentor. With this book, I honor his legacy: he was, in his own classy and oft times humorous way, an agent for positive change in our academic industry.

Dedication

As I was completing the data collection for this study, my first son was born. By the time I finished the analysis and a bulk of the preliminary writing, my spouse Darby and I were expecting our second son. Their lives are intricately wound up in this work, and I thank each of them for supporting me as I finished it. I dedicate this book to my boys, Clayton and Jeremy, in the great hope that the content herein leads to improved organizations such that, while my life has been good, their experience in life is exponentially better.

Onward.

Aaron D. Anderson
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