Chapter 3

Politics and the Resistance to Change

INTRODUCTION

Politics can be defined as the science centering on guiding and influencing policies and the conduct of work. Politics can play such a leading role in change management that it and resistance to change warrant a chapter of their own prior to starting to plan for change. After all, it is useful to know what you could potentially be in for before you start walking down the road to change. Politics and self-interest often dictate how people feel about change to their work or the work that they control.

Resistance is the active or passive opposition to change and the management of change. As you will see resistance can take many forms. Individuals and groups can also express or feel degrees of opposition. You must keep in mind that resistance is dynamic and changes depending on the specific situation. Why do people resist change?

- They feel that their jobs will be threatened.
- They will not be viewed with the same importance as they were after the change.
- The management structure above them will change.
- They will have to learn new software and systems.
- They will have to work in a different facility further from home.
- Friends and colleagues will become separated due to new organization of work.
- Their work will be scrutinized in more detail.
- Work performance goals will be increased.

As a result of resistance, individuals may take active steps to protect their positions. At Langley Aerospace (not a real firm), a group of employees was subjected to a reengineering effort. They felt threatened over their jobs. The future jobs they were promised were far less appealing than what they had had for years. The entire knowledge of the engineering process was in two places—their minds and documentation. The group gradually took the documentation home and eventually burned all copies without management having a clue. When management got around to completing change, they found that they could not change the process because the individuals in the group were the only ones who knew how the work was performed.

THE ROLE OF POLITICS

So you cannot ignore politics. It is present in every change situation. Up until now politics have been viewed in a negative light. This was done intentionally to raise your awareness and concern about political factors. This will now be altered here to a neutral state. Politics can be good or bad. A key lesson learned is that:

Change leaders must exploit political factors and use them for the advantage of implementing change.

What does the term, "exploit" mean? You want to first recognize that politics is a fact of life. No matter what you say or do, political factors do not disappear. So another critical success factor in change management is:

You have to understand the specific political situation in a business unit and then attempt to employ this knowledge in getting support for lasting change.

HOW TO DEAL WITH POLITICAL FACTORS

You can see that there are steps in understanding and working with political factors. If you have an organized method for coping with politics, your change efforts will be more successful. Here are some specific steps that have proven useful in past change programs.

- Recognize that individuals and groups act out of self-interest.
- Understand the political self-interest of employees and their supervisors through direct observation and casual conversation.
- Test your understanding by trying out small suggestions for change. Watch people's reactions. This will indicate where people are "coming from" and help you to comprehend their self-interest.

- Start to define the areas and activities in which they potentially feel threatened.
- Define approaches to ameliorate and ease their concerns. You may have to test some ideas out on them.
- Find out what they would like to do. Determine what changes they would make for themselves.
- Construct in your mind trade-offs between the necessary changes and what additional changes you can take that will please them.

Look at this list carefully. You are not trying to fully please people. If you did, the work would probably not change at all. But as was said in Chapter 1, there are many dimensions of change. You might change procedures and policies for the advantage of change, but you could also alter facilities or the working environment to make it a more pleasant place to work, for example. A key lesson learned is understanding that:

*Change at its most fundamental level involves trade-offs
in order to be lasting.*

Change can be imposed, but such change is often the most fleeting and short-lived.

Let's examine people and their work more. In almost every process there are things that people do not like. But they learn to accept them. As in human relationships, there are trade-offs. After a time an individual will stop thinking about these unpleasant things since they feel that nothing can be done. The thoughts are often suppressed. Now the change leaders and team come on the scene. If they are proceed carefully, they will listen to what the people who do the work have to say. They can then draw out what has been troubling the individuals for so long. This is, perhaps, a turning point toward success in change management. The lesson learned here is:

*Success in getting lasting change is to have the employees doing the
work to admit that there are problems and issues with the way and
manner in which the work is performed.*

When you have the admission that the current methods don't work well, then you open the door to having them accept change and even to invent potential changes. This will be a central theme as the book proceeds.

TYPES OF RESISTANCES

There are a number of ways to categorize resistance. This is useful for the change team and change management because it helps to understand, discuss, and counter the resistance. One way is by passive and active resistance.

- *Active resistance*. This is rarer in most societies due to culture. In active resistance, some employees will openly question the changes and indicate a lack of support for change. Active resistance is easier to cope with since it is out in the open. You can work with the problems that they raise. In the worst case you can even work around the person.
- *Passive resistance*. This may be difficult to detect. It takes time for you to uncover signs of this in people. People may actually express support for change, but when change is getting closer to being implemented, the resistance starts to come through.

A second related perspective is to consider open versus underground resistance. Underground resistance is more difficult to cope with than passive resistance, because it is active resistance but not evident. In fact, you can create a chart such as that in Figure 3.1. Here one axis is active and passive. The other is open and underground. You can place people's initials in the chart. In Figure 3.1, xyz is a person who actively resists change and openly does so. This is typically a king or queen bee. Person abc is someone who actively resists but does not do so out in the open. Person abc is a real threat to change management since you may not detect that abc feels this way early in the change effort. Person def is someone who is passively resistant to change and who now and then openly admits his/her concern. This is more unusual, but can often be addressed through logical argument. Finally, person ghi is someone whose resistance is passive and underground. These people are many in number since they have natural doubts about the change and whether it will really work. Oftentimes, these individuals can be brought along as the change effort proceeds. The change team may wish to identify individuals in this chart. However, it is obvious that this must be kept confidential.

Another way to view resistance is in terms of the source of the resistance. Already discussed have been emotional sources such as fear of loss of job and fear of power loss. Another source is that of dread of learning something new. Civilization has always had problems with getting new methods and technology

	Open	Underground
Active	xyz	abc
Passive	def	ghi

Figure 3.1   Categorization of Resistance

into widespread use—even after the new has been proven and demonstrated to be more effective than the old. This is particularly true with changes in business processes that involve automation. It is important to show the new system and, hence, the new process and procedures are simpler to use.

20 FACTORS BEHIND RESISTANCE

Several factors behind the resistance have been discussed. It is now time to examine a wider range of factors that give rise to resistance to change.

- *Fear of change is contagious*. People around you are afraid of change and transfer this to you. This is most frequently done by relating the worse case impacts of change. A cause of this is often that management did not clearly and convincingly spell out what would happen after the change.
- *Management emphasizes cost savings over productivity and satisfaction of employees*. The employees begin to look around and see that cost savings can only really come about in staff cuts. Junior employees become worried since they may feel that the last hired are the first terminated. Senior employees feel that their positions will be diminished.
- *In some situations people were not properly trained in their current jobs so that they have more resistance to change*. In many business units if, during the interview, it is found that they have done the same or similar work for another firm, they are hired and placed in a department. It is assumed that they do not need training since they know how of doing the work. However, this creates problems since there could be several different ways to do the work. This lack of standardization then leads to more problems when change is attempted.
- *Previous attempts at change in their business unit failed*. Employees may then think that this will be another failed attempt. They see no reason to support the change.
- *Change in another department resulted in job cutbacks*. The writing is on the wall. No matter what the management or the change team says, the real approach is perceived to be aimed at job cutback.
- *In carrying out the change, the change team does not value the knowledge and experience of the employees*. Their sense of worth is diminished so that they are more likely to resist change. Employees often sense this when they are asked what they do, but are not asked about how they do the work. They perceive that the change team does not care.
- *Fear of demotion or loss of position*. This has been discussed. It is interesting to note that the more management says that there will be no layoffs, the more the employees feel that there will be.

- *There has been a history of problems with management so that there is a lack of trust and faith*. Some managers in the past have gone hot and cold on change. They may have tried in a half-hearted way some exotic change method or something related to change. These initiatives then disrupted the work.
- *People are unwilling to participate in change because management views the additional work as part of the job and does not value it*. Management priorities are not clear. Moreover, the employees think that management feels that they must not do much work since they are insisting that the change can be carried out on top of existing work.
- *Employees receive different signals and messages from management and various members of the change team*. This leads not only to confusion, but also resistance. Different signals can be characterized by giving different directions, various and conflicting goals of change, and contradictory procedures or policies.
- *Employees participate and volunteer information at the start of the change effort, but they see that other people take credit for their work*. Some employees have embraced change and have come up with ideas of their own to the change team. Often, the employees had to really think about the change for a long time since they were not trained or have experience in change. Now they see members of the change team taking credit for their ideas. They rightly feel ripped off.
- *The employees are not told what is expected of them. There is a lack of planning with them*. They are just told how to change their work. There is no discussion of impact or what the benefits are to be. This fuzziness leads to confusion and then to resistance.
- *Resistance worked before in the past, it might work again*. This is human nature. What worked in the past is often what is perceived to work well in the current situation.
- *There is substantial management change and turnover*. Current management has directed that change be carried out. Yet, similar things have occurred in the past. Then the managers moved on to other jobs. The employees feel that if they can hold out longer, these managers will disappear.
- *The change is not addressing major needs*. The changes that are defined by the change team are good and perceived as such by the employees. However, there is no effort to address the major problems that the employees perceive to exist.
- *People are being pulled away from their work, but are still held accountable for the same performance*. The employees are involved in the change effort during working hours. However, their normal work is not done by anyone else. So they have to work over their breaks and lunch time to make up for the time lost in the change effort. What does this tell them about how management values their work?

- *The change leaders and team do not address issues raised by the employees*. The employees may raise legitimate issues and questions. The change team or leaders acknowledge the concerns, but nothing is done. The employees almost have no alternative, but to feel that (1) the change team does not care or value their opinions; (2) the change team is following their own agenda without regard to the employees.
- *There are major work pressures, such as year-end closing, right at the time when change is being attempted*. This is obviously poor timing and planning. However, you can still undertake change if you carefully work with these additional pressures.
- *After the change has been defined, middle managers and the change team tinker with the details of the change*. Specific directions have been given on how the work is to be done. A short time later a manager or supervisor arrives and sees what is going on and starts to insist on changes in details. The employees become confused and complain that they don't know what to do.
- *The change team does not make clear in detail how the new procedures are to work*. There are gaps between what directions they are given and what they must do. This is like being given a recipe for a food dish that is incomplete. You have to invent steps to fill the gaps, or you revert back to what you know works.

Now scan this list and what do you see? You see that the common sources of the problems were:

- Lack of coordination and training in carrying out change for the change team.
- Poor leadership by the change managers.
- Lack of coordination among managers and between managers and the change team.

When these problems occur, it should not surprise you that people resist change.

MOTIVATION FOR CHANGE

A person has to be motivated to change. This can be accomplished by accentuating both the positive and negative aspects of the situation.

You should assume that you will meet some resistance to change as this is only natural and a part of life. However, this does not mean that you should wait until resistance surfaces. You should be more proactive in trying to head off change. Part of this is to motivate people for change. How do you motivate employees toward change?
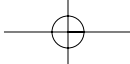
SIGNS OF RESISTANCE

Factors behind resistance have been covered so now it is time for you to examine the symptoms or signs of resistance to change. You will want to use the following list with the change team so that they become more aware of this as well.

- *Tone of voice*. As you present change management to employees and supervisors, look for their reaction in terms of what they say. Make sure that there are two people from the change leaders and the change team at such a presentation. Why? It is difficult to pick up signs when you are doing the talking.
- *Body language*. As you discuss change, watch how the people in the audience move. If they squirm in their chairs, then they are uncomfortable with what you are saying.
- *What employees discuss in your presence*. How carefully do they phrase and choose their words? This will be a sign of lack of familiarity at first. However, if it continues after initial contact, then there could be a problem.
- *What employees discuss in their breaks and lunch time*. Try to sit down at a table near them and read a magazine. See if you can overhear what they are saying. You will have to do this repeatedly to get them to feel comfortable with you there so that they will be more open with each other. You will find that the employees will begin to ask you questions about the effort. This is a good opportunity to detect problems and also to allay their concerns.

ADDRESS AND OVERCOME RESISTANCE

Don't wait for a major problem involving resistance to surface. Addressing resistance begins when you kick off the change effort with the employees of the business departments involved. In the kickoff meeting you will be discussing the approach to change, goals, benefits, and the organization of the effort. More on these later. You will also be stressing the following points (worded toward the employees).

- It is natural to feel most comfortable with the way things are since you have been doing this work for some time. Therefore, it is also natural to feel uneasy with change. The change team hopes to make the change easier for you. That is what we seek—your participation.
- To some of you change may be threatening. However, in most change efforts that begin with improving the work, change results in positive things for you. After all, management has begun with change and not downsizing.
- We are also aware of things that are cultural or political that affect change. That is also natural. So we will work with you on these as well.

Note that you are openly acknowledging in a soft manner that politics and resistance exist.

Once you have some symptoms of resistance or negative political factors, there is a tendency to want to go in and address these head-on. This is a bad idea in almost all situations. For:

> *Taking immediate action when you detect resistance will tend to drive the resistance underground instead of eliminating it.*

Remember too that you are only aware of the symptoms—not the causes of their concerns. Another basic idea from experience is that you should just observe and note the politics and resistance. Why? Because you act, you want to be decisive. If you act too soon, you reveal that you are aware of their resistance and the politics. They will now be strongly on their guard.

You really should have a resistance strategy. This is your approach to the timing and actions that you will take. A fundamental part of your resistance strategy should be:

> *Take action on resistance only to accomplish a positive goal—not to quash the resistance.*

What is a positive goal? Here are some examples. Implement a round of quick hits. Prepare the infrastructure for change. Implement a new policy or procedure. If you just try to crush resistance, it will likely just instill negative feelings and engender greater resistance. What do you do then? Couple the change or action with the positive benefits of the change.

Now we come to tactics. Without directly attacking the resistance, what can you do to overcome it? Here are some suggestions:

- Focus on detailed transactions and work. Politics becomes less relevant the closer you get to the actual work. This is because people are so busy doing the work that they have little time for politics.
- Center your attention on standard, non-exception transactions. These do not require much knowledge or involvement of king bees or queen bees.
- Isolate and deal with exceptions in a group. In that way you can give all of your effort at the exceptions, workarounds, and shadow systems –and the king and queen bees—without being distracted.
- As you work at the detailed level, you can allude to concerns of employees. They will start to see that there will still be jobs since the transactions and work cannot usually be totally automated.
- Volunteer to involve supervisors after you get started in the detailed analysis and change effort with the employees. However, keep out the king and queen bees. How do you do this? Indicate to the king and queen bees that they are too important in the other work (exceptions, workarounds, etc.) to be involved in the general work.
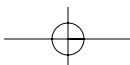
In general, the more time you spend with the people doing the work, the more you gain their confidence. The more you gain their confidence and trust, the less they feel concerned or threatened. Then it becomes harder for the king and queen bees, and the supervisors to interfere.

What are the signs of your progress? One sign is that employees become more open and relaxed around the change team. A second sign is that the king and queen bees become more resigned to change. Another sign is that the supervisors back off and leave you alone.

HOW TO USE POLITICS TO SUPPORT CHANGE

More generally, let's now move back and consider how you can exploit politics and political factors to reinforce your change effort. The first thing to remember is that everyone is aware of politics, but in most organizations it is not discussed openly. It is the hidden agenda. In order for management, the business unit employees, and the change team to deal with any political issue or symptom of a problem, it has to be discussed. One lesson learned here is:

If you wait until a political issue becomes critical, it is probably going to be too late.

Why is this? Because previously there was no discussion of politics. Now you have to have the discussion with no preparation. Not a good idea.

A better approach is to start asking about business relationships when you are out collecting information on the work. This is a more subtle approach to starting a political discussion with business unit employees. As you work with these people more and more, there should be a feeling of trust so that you will begin to pick up political information. What information might be useful to the change team? Here are some examples.

- Relationships between managers, supervisors, and employees. Whom do the employees respect the most?
- The existing power structure within the department.
- Identification of king and queen bees.
- Relationship between departments.

You also want to have a session with the change team in which you devote almost the entire meeting to the importance of politics and culture, why it cannot be ignored, and how early obtained information can aid in change management. You also have some action items for the team members. When they go out into departments, they are to be sensitive to political factors and to report what they learn verbally to you. It is not a good idea to use a memo or e-mail here. Telephone or in-person communications are best.

USE A SCORE CARD FOR YOUR PERFORMANCE

Figure 3.2 provides a score card to assess your knowledge, skills, and progress with respect to politics and resistance. Some discussion of each of the points is useful here.

- Elapsed time between when the change effort started and resistance was first detected. Here the longer the time period generally means that you are less in touch with what is going on. If this time is short, then give yourself a high grade since you are becoming sensitive to people's feelings.
- Number of times that you were surprised when political issues surfaced. Obviously, the lower the number, the better. However, this is never likely to be zero since there is always something new that will surface.
- Number of political issues that surfaced that were new to you. This is similar to the previous one. A large number raises a concern that you are not paying sufficient attention to political factors.
- After several weeks in a department, the percentage of employees that you cannot determine if they are resistors to change. This is the great unknown in change management. If this percentage remains high, it may mean that the change team is not being sufficiently sensitive to the politics and resistance.

Element	Rating	Comment
Elapsed time between when the change effort started and resistance was first detected		
Number of times that you were surprised when political issues surfaced		
Number of political issues that surfaced that were new to you		
After several weeks in a department, the percentage of employees that you cannot determine if they are resistors to change		
Number of political issues as a percentage of the total number of issues surfaced		
List of symptoms of resistance that the team has encountered		
Reaction of the change team to discussions of politics and resistance		
Average time to resolve a political issue		
Attitude of the employees to the change effort at the start of the effort		
Attitude of the employees to the change effort now		
Involvement of the employees in the change effort		
Extent of new ideas and issues related to work that were surfaced by employees		

Figure 3.2   A Score Card to Assess your Knowledge, Skills, and Progress

- Number of political issues as a percentage of the total number of issues surfaced. This is a measure that will be used throughout the change effort. Initially, the percentage should be relatively high. Then it should diminish as work and technical issues surface and, hopefully, overwhelm the political issues.
- List of symptoms of resistance that the team has encountered. This list should grow quickly at the start of the change effort in a department. It should then taper off. If it continues to grow, then there could more problems and deeper problems than you originally thought.
- Reaction of the change team to discussions of politics and resistance. The team at first should be slightly nervous in participating in this discussion. Then they should feel more comfortable.
- Average time to resolve a political issue. This is the start of measuring the elapsed time between when an issue surfaces and when it is resolved. Remember too that an issue that is resolved can resurface in different symptoms. So be careful when you analyze symptoms.
- Attitude of the employees to the change effort at the start of the effort. This should be a mixed picture. Assessing yourself here makes you more aware of what people think when you start the change effort in a department.
- Attitude of the employees to the change effort now. Hopefully, this is improved. However, it can be the case (and it has happened to us) that employees become polarized. That is, they become either avid supporters or resistors to change.
- Involvement of the employees in the change effort. Over time employees should become more involved by volunteering issues in the work and ideas for change.
- Extent of new ideas and issues related to work that were surfaced by employees. This is a measure of what new ideas and issues were defined by the employees. Value issues as much as ideas since ideas often arise from issues.

You should administer this score card for yourself on a regular basis. Initially, this should be every two weeks to force yourself to be more sensitive to politics and resistance. Another suggestion is for you to have the change team members do the same.

MARKET CHANGE MANAGEMENT

As you will see in each chapter, marketing of change management is essential for success. Marketing forces you to think about how people view the change effort. By giving attention to marketing you avoid becoming complacent and internally focused. A main concept in marketing to overcome resistance and deal

with politics is to be soft. That is, you do not want to be heavy handed and appear to be forcing change upon the employees. Here is your basic approach to marketing here.

> *Focus on change by indicating and drawing attention to what*
> *will happen if change is not undertaken.*

This is a repeated theme in change management—stressing the downside of the status quo. What you are doing is employing techniques used by automobile sales-people and doctors. A car salesman wants to see your car and ensure that you are aware of the age and problems with your car. In that way you will want a new car. In medicine no one wants to have an operation. It is expensive and takes you away from your family and work. Moreover, there is the risk involved. So how do doctors deal with this and get you to agree to have the operation? Through fear. They raise fear by indicating what will happen to you if you do not have the operation.

EXAMPLES

ROCKWOOD COUNTY

As was indicated in Chapter 1, politics abound at Rockwood. The place simply oozes with politics and infighting. Recognizing the political factors is very simple. What to do about this and exploit it to help your change effort is another matter. Our approach was to find the departments that favored change and had some political power. Then we used these departments to support change. Rather than deal with single employees who resisted change, we were dealing with almost entire departments who dreaded change. By leveraging off of the support-ive departments, we were able to get Quick Hits. Then we used these to get into the departments that resisted change. Our next step was to approach the lower level employees in departments who resisted change. Then we established teams across departments so that the ideas of change and issues of these junior employees could be supported. This approach will be examined in more detail as we get into implementation.

LEGEND MANUFACTURING

At first the picture at Legend is almost the opposite of the Rockwood situation. But as we got into the firm, we discovered that while there were differences, there were departments who resisted change and who had derailed the previous change efforts. By asking about what had happened in the past, we were able to uncover the informal political structure at the middle level and supervisory level of

Legend. We then used this information to pursue change employing the methods discussed in this chapter.

POTENTIAL ISSUES AND RISKS

- When a change team lacks experience in undertaking change, there is often a tendency to overreact to resistance and politics. Then the team may commit the major mistake of trying to correct the situation and attitude on the spot. This is generally not a good idea since it may instill even more resistance. Moreover, it will drive resistance underground.
- You and the change team can get carried away with politics. It can be addictive because in an organization it resembles a soap opera. To overcome this potential issue, the change leaders must put the politics and resistance into perspective.
- It can happen that middle level managers will openly support change in front of their own management. Then when you move to implement change, they raise many issues. They want to study the potential of change more. How do you address this issue? Do not wait until it happens. Raise this as a potential issue to upper management before any presentation. Indicate in the meeting that paying lip service to change is not enough— they must participate. So you should have some immediate actions.

LESSONS LEARNED

- In order to detect passive resistance consider proposing some small changes to the work and see how individuals reacts. Ask them what they would to see done with the process. If you get nothing back, then there is likely to be passive resistance.
- When you have detected passive resistance, the question is what to do about it. A natural inclination is to try to change their minds directly and immediately. This often does not work well. It is better to take time and try to understand the emotional and psychological source of the resistance.
- How do you show people that a new process and way of doing of work is easier? By having the most junior people who are eager to get ahead do it first. Then it is evident to more senior people that it can be done with a limited learning curve. Patience and a sense of humor are also keys here.
- People often can state their problems and issues with their work. It is harder for them to think of changes and improvements since they have often learned to accept their situations. Your strategy should be to treat and value issues as much as new ideas. Then you want to turn the issue into a solution or opportunity by analyzing the issue with the employees.
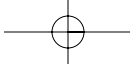
SUMMARY

An important thing to remember from this chapter is that politics and resistance can be employed by the change management team in positive ways to facilitate change. You cannot expect to bring everyone along to support change. However, as you can implement Quick Hits and people see results, the morale and support for change should increase. Several other significant points raised were:

- The change team will be involved in the politics whether you like it or not. So it is better to orient them in the beginning and then to discuss it rather openly as the work progresses.
- You should use the score card defined in this chapter on an ongoing basis to ensure that you are aware of the political factors affecting the change effort.