Managing Resistance to Change in SEAM

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Resistance to change has been recognized as an initial hurdle in organization development (OD) since Koch and French (1948) and Lewin (1952) first formulated the principles of OD in general and the Force-Field Analysis in particular. Deloitte and Touche's study of 400 organizations led them to conclude that resistance is the primary reason for the failure of change efforts (cited in Erwin & Garman, 2010), and as high as 70% of change efforts fail (Aiken & Keller, 2009). Clearly, managing resistance must be considered as an essential part of change strategy.

SEAM takes a unique approach to "unfreezing" the organization in its initial emphasis on the hidden costs of the status quo. While many client systems resist change due to apprehension about the uncertainty of the future and the potential risks and costs of changing, SEAM's identification of the actual current costs of maintaining the status quo provides an impetus for change.

In this paper, we describe a continuing implementation of SEAM in higher education that was initially described in an earlier issue of this journal (Kalnbach & Swenson, 2016). The implementation began in September 2015 within our School of Business and Technology (SBT), which offers a variety of degree and certificate programs in multiples formats (face-to-face, online, and blended/hybrid). At the time of the SEAM intervention, the school included 20 full-time faculty and staff members as well as a large number of adjunct faculty. After the dean of the school introduced the SEAM intervention as an opportunity and obtained initial buy-in, two SEAM consultants facilitated the intervention process. The consultants worked with a smaller leadership group to complete the initial data-gathering. Ultimately, information was gathered from all members of the school to be used for the Hidden Cost Analysis and subsequent Mirror Effect and Expert Opinion phases of the SEAM process.

In the spring and fall of 2016 progress from the previous year's implementation of SEAM in the School of Business and Technology was reviewed and showed good indications of planned change, but also some areas of continuing concern. Another progress update was completed in spring of 2017. The mean results for the survey conducted at the three time periods described in the previous sentences are included in Table 1. Some highlights of the results of these surveys conducted with the SBT members included the following:

- On a scale of 1 to 4, the average rating given to the statement, "I feel I have made a valuable contribution to the SEAM process" was 2.77 in spring 2016, 3.0 in fall 2016, and 2.7 in spring 2017. It was one of the lowest rated statements in the survey.

- Another concerning area was the average rating provided to the statement, "I am clear what is expected of me." In spring 2016, the average was 2.75, while in fall 2016 it was 3.31 before falling again in spring 2017 to 2.9.

- In response to the statement, "I support moving forward with SEAM next year," there was a slight decline in the average rating. It declined from 3.15 in spring 2016 to 3.0 in fall 2016 and to 2.9 in spring 2017.

Table 1

Mean results of the survey addressing progress with SEAM and SBT climate

Statements rated on a 1-4 scale	Spring 2016	Fall 2016	Spring 2017
The SEAM Intervention has been helpful	3.15	3	3.1
I feel I have been given the opportunity to participate in the SEAM process	3.54	3.92	3.4
I feel I have made a valuable contribution to the SEAM process	2.77	3	2.7
I support moving forward with SEAM next year	3.15	3	2.9
I understand SB&T's strategic priorities and goals	3.08	3.38	3.4
I support and am committed to achieving SB&T's strategic goals	3.42	3.69	3.5
I am clear about what is expected of me.	2.75	3.31	2.9
I feel hopeful about the future of SB&T	3.42	3.38	3.5
I am comfortable collaborating with all members of SB&T	2.85	2.85	3
I receive support and mentoring from my peers in SB&T	3.23	3.15	3
Generally, I feel my voice is heard and that I am listened to	3.15	3.62	3.4
I feel that my ideas and contributions are appreciated	3.23	3.46	3.1

While there were clear areas of progress and satisfaction, about a quarter to a third of participants expressed some degree of concern or reservations about the intervention at different checkpoints in the process. These reservations are not unexpected, and about 16% of members of organizations in general are often characterized as "laggards" and 34% "late majority" regarding change (Rogers, 1995). These areas of less success led the authors to explore reasons for resistance to change and to subsequently propose a model for managers to use when dealing with resistance.

The authors met with most of the faculty and staff of SBT to review their perceptions of the change effort and explore any reluctance and resistance to the transition. The following questions were used to stimulate discussion:

- What were your initial thoughts when SEAM was introduced in 2015?
- What was your initial level of engagement in SEAM (1-5 rating)?
- Describe any hesitation, reluctance or resistance to the idea.
- Have your feelings about SEAM changed?
- What helped that change?
- Do you have any lingering or new reluctance or doubts? If yes, describe them.
- What do you think it would take to change those?
- What is your current level of engagement (1-5 rating)?

The results of these discussions led the authors to believe there was much variation in both the initial levels of engagement in SEAM and in the reaction to the intervention over time. All faculty and staff members shared some type of hesitation or doubts related to the SEAM process in the beginning stages. For some, their skepticism was partially due to failed attempts at change in the past. For others, the hesitation focused more on a lack of detailed information and background related to SEAM, or lack of evidence in US higher education settings. And finally, there was another group of individuals who were cautiously optimistic about engaging in the process, but who questioned whether the timing was right or whether there would be value added by the intervention.

As the SEAM intervention unfolded, some positive changes were noticeable to the faculty and staff in the School. For faculty who were not closely involved or in the leadership group, they seemed to agree that one of the most positive changes was that SEAM had provided a platform for open discussion of important and relevant issues. Alternatively, those faculty and staff who were part of the leadership group recognized the benefits of the SEAM intervention as including increased self-awareness of how time was being spent (which led to changes in individual behavior) and as providing a method for prioritizing issues that were causing inefficiencies. However, there was also concern that the positive outcomes would dwindle over the course of the process and that there would be the potential for new issues, problems, or hidden costs to occur. Additionally, those members of the School who were not participating in the smaller project work groups associated with specific areas of concern reported a decrease in their level of engagement with the process. The variation in reactions to both the proposed change process (SEAM) and the changes themselves fit well with the following model focused on the adoption of innovation.

Adopters and resistance to innovation

Members of organizations constitute several clusters or segments of stakeholders who have different responses to proposed change. Rogers's (1995) theory of the diffusion of innovations identifies five groups of adopters (see Figure 1). Innovators are those who actively seek innovation, are comfortable with change, have high tolerance of risk and uncertainty. Early adopters are often leaders, influencers, and respected persons in the organization are intrigued by

new ideas that serve strategy. The early majority are deliberate, mainstream, and practical people who accept change when encouraged by the leaders. Late majority are those who are more reluctant to adopt change until it is proven, tend to be more skeptical, and may wait until the change is required. Laggards are the most resistant segment and are generally more change averse. They are suspicious of innovations, uncomfortable with uncertainty, wait until they are forced to adopt, and may actively resist change.
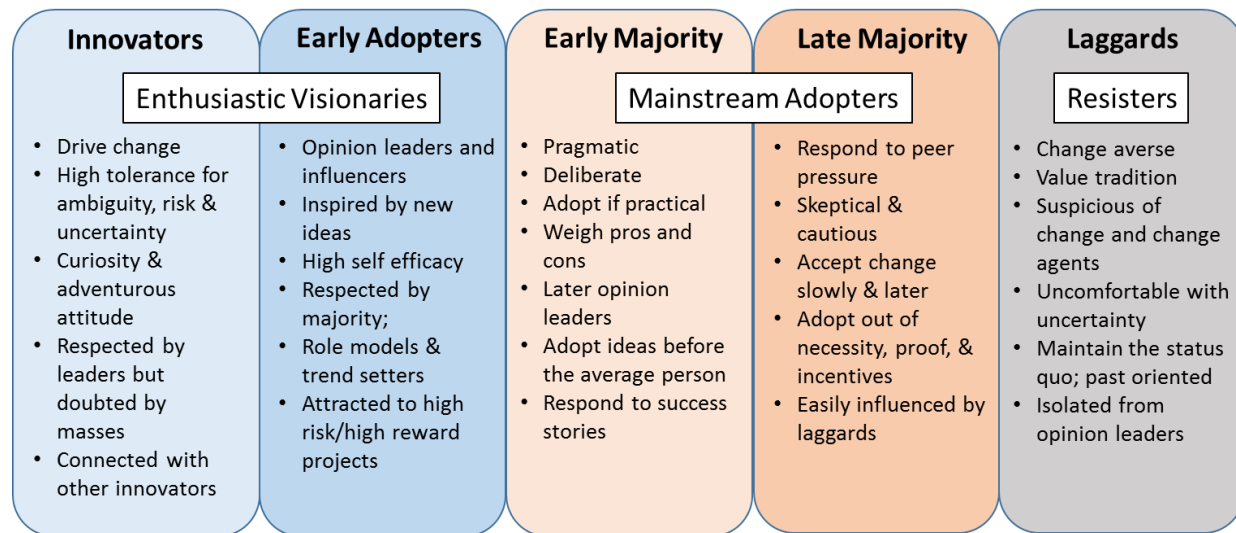
Innovators	Early Adopters	Early Majority	Late Majority	Laggards
Enthusiastic Visionaries		Mainstream Adopters		Resisters
• Drive change • High tolerance for ambiguity, risk & uncertainty • Curiosity & adventurous attitude • Respected by leaders but doubted by masses • Connected with other innovators	• Opinion leaders and influencers • Inspired by new ideas • High self efficacy • Respected by majority; • Role models & trend setters • Attracted to high risk/high reward projects	• Pragmatic • Deliberate • Adopt if practical • Weigh pros and cons • Later opinion leaders • Adopt ideas before the average person • Respond to success stories	• Respond to peer pressure • Skeptical & cautious • Accept change slowly & later • Adopt out of necessity, proof, & incentives • Easily influenced by laggards	• Change averse • Value tradition • Suspicious of change and change agents • Uncomfortable with uncertainty • Maintain the status quo; past oriented • Isolated from opinion leaders

Figure 1. Adopter categories

Each of the adopters probably have some form of resistance. For example, innovators may paradoxically resist the status quo, instead looking for the next new idea. Early adopters may resist ideas that are not compatible with the current strategy. Early majority may be resistant to new ideas until presented with leadership support, thorough explanations, and how it is better than what they are doing. Late majority may resist innovations until they are required to change or are disadvantaged in some way. Laggards tend to be generally suspicious of change, and may argue "we've tried that before." However, one of the overlooked values of resistance to change is that it slows down impulsive change and requires leadership to thoroughly explain the rationale for and advantages of change.

Resistance to change

Early writing about change has often referred to "overcoming" resistance to change. However, more recent approaches to change management suggest that "resistance" may be more useful as an indication of what requires further information, explanation, and support to get people engaged. Lewin's early work also recognized that efforts to only increase motivation to change or overcome resistance, often just increased the resistance. Instead, he recommended that the resistance be appreciated and understood to find ways to mitigate the resistance. His Force-

Field Analysis (see Figure 2) represents the juxtaposing of forces for and against change as a way of identifying dynamics of a situation that must be understood and successfully managed.
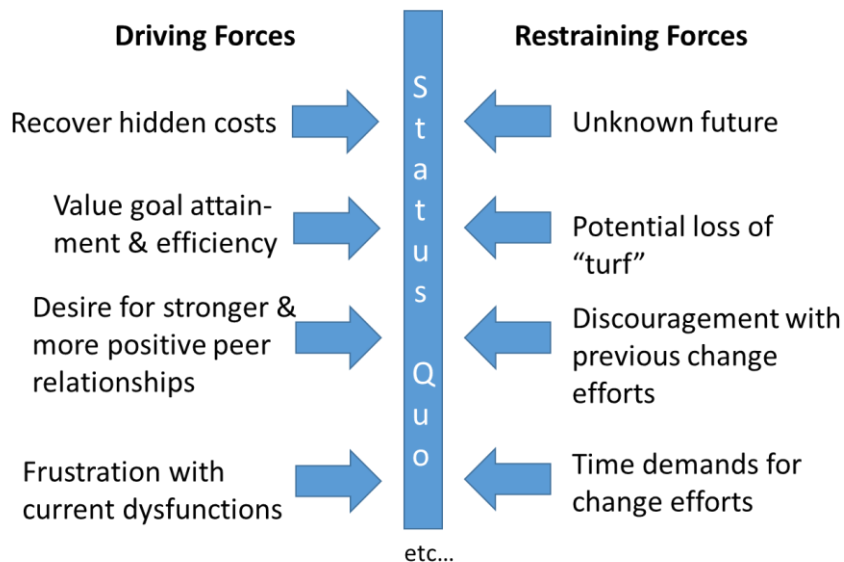

Figure 2. Force-Field Analysis

When some participants continue their resistance to participating in the change efforts, and such resistance interferes with the morale or participation of others, or impedes progress, especially if the change is critical and time-sensitive, managers must consider more direct action to reduce the resistance.

Information, explanation and dialog are the preferred methods of encouraging change because they enroll people to participate in the change process. However, when change is urgent as in the case of crises or market competition, dealing with resistance may take valuable time and resources. Even with additional effort, some people may not be willing to participate, and their reluctance can adversely influence other stakeholders or interfere with implementation of the innovation. In these circumstances, the system is not enabling change and managers are responsible for reducing resistance more directly.

The model described here shows a range of interventions a manager can use, ranging from creating low power situations where dialog and peer pressure may persuade people, to more direct task reassignments and sanctions. It is important that managers recognize that they have many options for dealing with the complications of prolonged resistance to change. These methods can be grouped into three categories: Dialog, peer pressure, and managerial interventions, and these also vary by the level of power exercised (see Figure 3).

Dialog involves engaging people in candid conversations about their hopes and concerns. It may help them explore the hidden costs and problems and risks of not changing. Showing them evidence of effectiveness of similar change initiatives can reduce concerns. Finally, use of

a graphic force-field analysis can reduce the face-to-face intensity of dialog and redirect it to the visual model for discussion, as well as focus on reasons for resistance and how to mitigate them.

Peer pressure is similar to dialog, but emphasis is on relationship influence rather than information. Encouragement from peers to listen to the plan, express their concerns, and at least give a trial effort can facilitate cautious engagement. Further sharing of success stories and how peers overcame their reluctance can help. Agreeing to dialog toward a consensus and listening to and respecting everyone who expresses their opinions is important, but in the end, all must agree to support the consensus decision to enable the group moving forward. Finally, as more peers participate in the change, new norms are developed that can have an implicit pressure to conform to the emerging culture.

The last group of interventions are largely used by management in response to ongoing reluctance to support or engage in the change. These options are usually followed when resistance adversely affects the progress with the change or morale of others who are participating. These range from direct managerial contact seeking explanation and providing encouragement, to directives and supports to change, to sanctions, reassignment, and even dismissal.
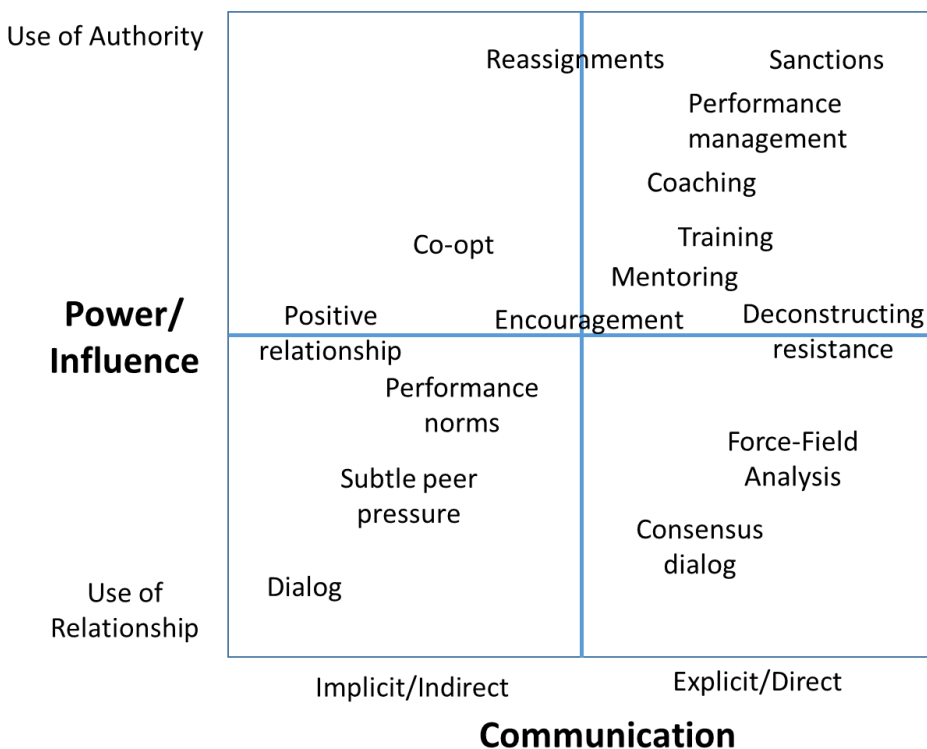

Figure 3. Interventions for managing resistance

In the intervention for our School of Business and Technology, a number of the methods described in the previous paragraphs were applied at the time. However, they were not necessarily applied in an intentional manner. For example, although there were times when individuals would suggest using a new procedure (e.g., a process for making decisions), the "peer pressure" was minimal. Most of those who used subtle peer pressure or other similar tactics were doing so somewhat unknowingly. In addition, although sanctions and reassignments were not used to manage resistance in our situation, other more direct interventions such as coaching and mentoring were used in some cases. Yet, again, these approaches were not used in a systematic way. The model provided does highlight a way to develop a planned and systematic approach to dealing with various types and levels of resistance.

Recommendations for continuing mitigation of resistance

With this theoretical framework and personal experience with regard to the ongoing SEAM intervention in mind, we have concluded the following suggestions could be helpful in dealing with the resistance to change.

- Solicit doubts and questions at the beginning of the intervention and respond to them. This openness helps create a norm of transparency and engagement and helps identify areas that need further clarification and explanation.

- Revisit engagement and the meaningfulness of the proposed change for all stakeholders. Ensuring commitment to the intervention involves periodically revisiting the intervention rather than just evaluating it at the end of the process. While there is no standard time for review, in an academic setting 8-week terms or 16-week semesters would be sufficient for a review of progress and issues.

- Integrate information from consultants, ongoing client system feedback, and from different tools used to gauge reaction to change. Multiple sources and perspectives of information help reduce potential biases and blind spots of single sources. Inconsistencies in what is reported can also help identify potential areas of conflict or gaps.

- Create and monitor metrics for engagement in the change process and progress on goals. It is not the metric that is important—it is the part of the process that metric reflects that should be attended to. Engagement metrics can include how many people contribute to feedback, the balance of positive and negative feedback, attendance and participation at meetings, and use of constructive or "solution language" in that emphasize suggestions rather than just complaints.

- Highlight successes for dialog and continual change planning. Many initially successful projects reach a peak and then begin a decline due to feeling that it was an end point. Successful interventions are ongoing improvements and reviews. Reporting successes and acknowledging people's efforts helps remind them of progress made and personal accomplishments. Identifying reduction of hidden costs and increase in productive work is a strong motivator.

- Consider interventions based on urgency and the impact of resistance on other change efforts for each adopter segment. Dialog and encouraging all people to be on board is

most desirable in a change effort. However, during crises when the survival of an organization is at risk, there may not be sufficient time for patient discussion, and resistance may not be acceptable. In these circumstances, the reason for pressing forward should be given, and more assertive management of resistance may be necessary.

- For all interventions, demonstrate listening, empathic concern, and respect of stakeholders

The ongoing SEAM intervention in the School of Business and Technology has been associated with skepticism, reluctance, anticipation, and enthusiasm from different members of the school. Learning about their thoughts and reactions to the process provided the basis for the development of a framework that could be used to manage varying levels of resistance to change during different phases of the intervention and change process.

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