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Resistance to Change: Recruitment for Diversity in a Public Safety Organization

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RESISTANCE TO CHANGE:
RECRUITMENT FOR DIVERSITY IN A PUBLIC SAFETY ORGANIZATION

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INTRODUCTION

Resistance to change and innovation appears to be endemic in public sector agencies despite the implementation of well-designed strategic plans to reinvent themselves. This dilemma is a potential fatal blow to the executive leadership that wishes to affect change in an ailing organization whether it is local, state, or federal. Bureaucratic resistance to change has been written about extensively and was identified as a serious obstacle in the 1993 effort of the federal government to change internal culture through reform (Kettl, 1994; Carroll, 1995).

In the Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety, a recruitment program for entry level officers (dual trained fire fighters and police officers) was reorganized from a slow-moving rigid process, into a fast paced innovative program that met with both horizontal and vertical resistance from staff and management. The recruitment action plan was part of a citywide reinvention implemented by the city manager and executed by the new director of Public Safety.

Despite a strategic plan, statistical analysis, and support from the executive officer, mid-level managers, supervisors, and line personnel sporadically resisted the new program and hindered its timely implementation.

Many authors and organizational consultants have presented solutions to this dilemma in the form of leadership seminars, quality management programs and reinvention strategies, yet the problem persists not only in Sunnyvale, but also in many public sector organizations. In contrast to this broad examination of reinvention methods, little research has been done specifically related to the effect of individual or

group behavior on management reform efforts (Hennessey, 1998; Henry, 1995). The possibility exists that in spite of dynamic well-structured reform programs, a single individual can choose to resist change and thereby derail the entire process.

Is there a common, fundamental resistance to change that is related to how bureaucracies function regardless of culture, or is it limited to the behavior and choice of the individual person? Once the resistance is identified and isolated, can the resistance be overcome in such a way as to meet the goals of the organization, program, or manager? If yes, by which methods can the resistance be overcome to achieve the desired outcome of the new process?

This research proposes that resistance to change is more a function of personal choice than organization structure. Second, resistance to change can be effectively overcome by leveraging personal choice to cause an individual to seek personal security as their motivating force, thereby linking that security to program success. Last, when an individual believes that resistance cannot be overcome through repeated efforts, the resistance will be overcome by the individual choosing to go around the obstacle, usually in violation of structure and rules.

A case study of a targeted recruitment effort by the Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety between 1998 and 2002 will provide specific reference to resistance to change for this research report. Literature review was culled from various scholarly texts, public administration and public management journals, and research papers related to reinvention, reorganization, and leadership.

Qualitative research will form the basis for this project, with the author's personal observations included as a significant viewpoint. Quantitative data analysis was

obtained through a descriptive survey of managers and supervisors of the Department of Public Safety.

Case study overview

The Department of Public Safety provides police and fire services for the City of Sunnyvale with a staff that is fully cross-trained as both peace officers and fire fighters. The agency has a staff of 300, of which 231 are sworn personnel. The operating budget is \$47,865, 526, and the agency serves a population of approximately 125,000 in 24 square miles. Sunnyvale Public Safety is the second largest law enforcement agency in Santa Clara County, and is the largest of three agencies in California that operate with fully cross-trained Public Safety Officers.

The City of Sunnyvale is situated on the San Francisco Peninsula, in Santa Clara County, approximately 45 minutes south of San Francisco and 15 minutes north of San Jose. Santa Clara County is ethnically diverse, and in the 2000 census the population breakdown was 62% Caucasian, 19% Hispanic American, 15% Asian American, 3% African American and 1% Pacific Islander/Other.

The City of Sunnyvale had a population that was 67% Caucasian, 17% Asian American, 12% Hispanic American and 3.1% African American. In July of 2000, the Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety sworn staff was made up of 81% Caucasian, 7.5% Asian American, 5.3% Hispanic American, 4.4% African American and 0.4% Native American. Female officers represented 4.9% of the staff (Appendix A).

The city manager oversees all operations of the city at the direction of the city council. The mayor of Sunnyvale is elected from the council and serves a two-year

term. The chief, who manages fire and police operations through 4 administrative captains and 6 team captains, directs the Department of Public Safety.

The Department enjoys support from the citizens it serves, other city departments, and the employees within its own structure. This support and cooperative attitude has been fostered over the past fifty years since the inception of Public Safety in 1950. The citizens perceive the Department of Public Safety as professional and thorough, and they receive a wide array of services from the city and the department. Internal management of Public Safety also views their staff as professional, honest, and exceptional. These observations have been analyzed through annual citizen satisfaction surveys and internal employee satisfaction surveys that typically rate overall satisfaction at 90% or better.

In 1997, a new city manager was hired who began a multi-year comprehensive review of all internal operations. A component of this review included the analysis of the ethnic representation of the Department of Public Safety sworn staff. It was the city manager's goal to have the ethnicity of the staff represent the ethnicity of the city and county as much as possible. It was also very important to have a larger percentage of female employees on the staff.

In conjunction with the Human Resources Department of the City of Sunnyvale, the recruitment unit conducted an analysis of the ethnic diversity of the sworn members of our department. The results showed that the department did not reflect the ethnicity of the City. In July of 1998 it had a Caucasian male staff of 86.9%, Hispanics represented 3.6%, Asian Americans made up 5.0%, and African Americans represented 3.6%. Female Public Safety Officers made up 1.8% of the work force (Appendix A).

The city manager directed that the recruitment and retention procedures of the Department of Public Safety be analyzed for the purpose of writing a progressive recruitment plan. The plan was to define methods to hire and retain employees that would reflect the community they serve, while at the same time maintain the high standards for excellence that the department had fostered over the last fifty years.

In 1998, the recruitment unit recommended a proactive and continuous hiring process to mitigate the loss of exceptional candidates that was to be driven by a definitive plan. The recruitment plan outlined specific efforts that were designed to attract and hire a more diverse workforce, targeting female and minority applicants. The action plan detailed immediate, short, and long-term efforts to develop a workforce that would be more demographically comparable to the community.

The action plan was approved and directed from the office of the chief, and subsequently discussed at management meetings for the purpose of providing direction to the managers, who in turn were to support the efforts of the supervisors, officers, and civilian staff below them. The recruitment unit conducted internal outreach presentations to all work groups to ensure that the direction of the city manager and the chief was clearly understood and establish the guidelines and expectations of the recruitment action plan.

Despite clear direction from the executive office, strategic planning based upon statistical research and the formulation of attainable action plan goals, the program was perceived as a change in the historical way of doing business. For some members of the organization, regardless of rank, this change was seen as a threat to their established method of operation, their power or authority, or was beyond the acceptable

boundaries of how they would conduct business, regardless of the orders of the executives in charge.

Even though the plan met with sustained and repeated resistance, key stakeholders in the process refused to let the plan fail. Resistance was met with patience, education, and redirection. When that did not work, resistance was overcome through application of policy and procedure within the chain of command. If that did not work, the resistance was overcome by the personal choice of an individual to "do the end around" of the obstacle and achieve the goal.

After four years of implementation, the action plan produced a positive change in the demographics of the Department of Public Safety that was more reflective of the community it served:

Caucasian male staff of 71.3% (86.9% in 1998), Hispanics 11.0% (3.6% in 1998), Asian Americans 11.4% (5.0% in 1998), African Americans represented 3.5% (3.6% in 1998), and Native Americans represent 1.3% (0% in 1998). Female Public Safety Officers made up 8.3% of the work force (1.8% in 1998) (Appendix A).

This chain of events, and similar scenarios in other agencies, has been documented in numerous studies and texts, and is a major challenge for executives and their organizational consultants throughout governmental organizations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The research attempts to highlight the importance of resistance to change as a significant factor in the success or failure of the reinvention process. The focus is on identifying whether resistance is a product of the bureaucratic system into which an individual must conform, or the personal choice of an individual regardless of bureaucratic function. Three areas were examined for this report:

1. The nature and functional aspects of a bureaucracy
2. What is resistance and can it be overcome
3. How can resistance be overcome to produce positive results

Bureaucratic structure and resistance to change

To understand the larger issue of what creates resistance to change, one must understand what change and resistance are perceived to mean to those that are affected by them. A dictionary provides a base line definition for this research. Change is defined as: "To make different the form. Transform or convert. To become altered or modified. A variation or deviation." These descriptions may evoke powerful responses from an individual and connote significant movement, effort, and impact. Resistance is described as: "To withstand, strive against, or oppose. To withstand the action or effect of. To refrain or abstain from, especially with difficulty or reluctance (Random House College Dictionary, 224 ,1123)." Resistance has a tactile almost violent feel to it, providing a sense of emotional distress.

A paradox exists in the perception of the amount of change in bureaucracies, and the acceptance of that change by those managing the change and those that are implementing the change. Public agencies are often held to be ponderous entities that adhere to antiquated procedures and are immune to innovation and creativity. The reality is that public agencies are changing at a rapid rate due to the external legal, political, and social forces that shape their operating environment (Rainey, 1997). Even though this rapid change exists, internal resistance is widespread. Executives who propose the vision for change, however, are not in the loop of resistance. This pattern develops at the management, supervision, and line level where the implementation of the vision must take place (Bennett and Hess, 1996).

The structure of the bureaucracy is a factor in the impedance of effective change despite the fact that change is apparently occurring. Managerial habits, excessive layers of management, lack of delegation, and multiple reviews create structural roadblocks that instill a culture of resistance (Rainey, 1997). Private sector management does not face these issues to the same degree as public agencies, as they often do not have legal, legislative, or budgetary constraints that require multiple levels of review to ensure the greater good is served for the public.

These internal hurdles combine to formulate a rigid, slow moving process that does not reward creativity and change with swift, positive feedback. The rigid structure of the bureaucracy has existed for many years. Max Weber, the German sociologist, discussed the professional bureaucrat as a cog on a fixed route delineated by laws and administrative regulations. To this day, bureaucracies are broken down into highly

defined functional areas whereby managers tend to lead and employees tend to follow (Osborne and Plastrik, 1997).

Law enforcement agencies have experienced deeply entrenched bureaucratic traditions in the way they train new officers, promote tenured officers, and instill a sense of history and culture into the newest of the officers. Tradition is emphasized, innovation is not highly regarded, and supervisors are expected to uphold and exemplify the traditional way of doing things (Richardson, 1974).

This structure places too much emphasis on employee dependence, conservative action, self-service and control. These behaviors are tied into our own belief system and impact how we fit into the bureaucratic environment (Block, 1996). If the organization relies upon carefully crafted organization charts, rules, procedures, and chain of command, then communication, empowerment, and creativity will be lost.

Bureaucracies are not comfortable with rapid change. Executives may establish a realistic vision for the proposed change, but those tasked with the implementation and oversight often strive to slow the pace of change. They are accustomed to operating within a framework that moved in a predictable way. Evolution is preferred to revolution (Block, 1996). The bureaucratic system is attached to its own culture of values, norms, and expectations which forms the basis for what the employees do, and may be at the root of resistance to change because change is risky business. Organizations can make the statement that change is welcomed and expected, but the employee sees possible punishment and embarrassment for failure because that has been the cultural response thus far from management (Osborne and Plastrik, 1997).

Another informal framework exists for the organization member in the daily activities, reports, forms, and routines that become the background music of an organization. These routines may even become transparent to the employee and manager. Nonetheless, they form a structure similar to that of the formal, visible one that shapes the task environment (Schein, 1997).

Structure is further identified as a hurdle when the individual is examined as a member of a group operating within the context of the larger organizational culture. The sub-group has a culture that either impedes or supports a collaborative effort. If the group develops codes of behavior that are negative or antagonistic to the overall success of the vision of the organization, then resistance to change can become widespread and may be impossible to overcome. The employee, and the group as an entity, decide whether to cooperate with the change or not (Shafritz and Ott, 2001).

Can resistance to change be overcome?

The factors that contribute to resistance of change go beyond the bureaucratic structure of an organization. Human nature contributes to the equation in that people must be able to accept change regardless of the structure of their environment, overcome fear of the unknown that change proposes, and contribute to projects that may be counter to their personal views.

Organizational consultants are often brought into an agency to either propose the changes an executive may need to make to be successful, or to facilitate a smooth transition in an organization that has implemented changes but is struggling to make them work. Often, job classifications have been redefined, programs altered or

eliminated, and personnel have been reassigned or released from the agency. Even though these actions may have been discussed at length with the appropriate stakeholders and set forth in a strategic plan with vertical and horizontal input, the end result internally may be stress, confusion, and fear (Mathis and Jackson, 1997).

There is comfort in doing things the way they have always been done. Rituals have been passed down through generations of workers, procedures have long been complied with or ignored without repercussion, and tasks and goals appear clear to the staff. Change disrupts that comfort zone, but change is here to stay and will continue to be a major component in public agencies. There will not be a return to the "good old days." Staffing an organization with members that have the ability to change with the changing environment is the challenge for management. The organization must provide continuing education for the employee, and the employee must be of the mindset to accept the role of a life-long learner (Cozzetto, Pedeliski, Tipple, 1996).

Law enforcement organizations have a longstanding relationship with rituals, folkways, and maintenance of the status quo. In these environments, change may be seen as a threat or an indictment that their methods are no longer valid or have value. Change must be an evolutionary process that can be seen to work for the agency, not against it. Change and conflict often go hand in hand. With the advent of a more collaborative management, some of the conflict can be mitigated during joint resolution meetings that representative members attend. Middle managers perform a critical function in this process as they move between the line personnel and the upper managers to facilitate change (Bennet and Hess, 1996).

Implementing effective change may also include the declaration that past practice was not appropriate, or at a minimum is now outdated and must be evaluated. This indictment will often come from the very manager or executive staff that has been espousing that policy for years. In this case, the leaders must overcome their personal resistance to change and move forward (Bennett and Hess, 1996). The environment may have been the impetus for change such as the advent of legislation, emergency operations, or change of executive leadership.

However, questions are raised as to which factor has the greater impact on actually creating change, the environment or the individual. Theorists have examined both factors as they relate to differing organizations. While the task environment has a significant impact, human choice and the human as supreme being in the environment seem to be the more appropriate theories as it relates to why resistance to change occurs regardless of the executive decree (Henry, 1995).

Collaboration and partnerships are effective means to build support for unpopular or difficult decisions. Federal managers no longer rely solely on management reform laws and statutory restraints to improve their efficiency. Care and concern for their staff and clients in the form of good public relations expands their ability to overcome resistance (Laurent, 2000).

How resistance is overcome

Various means exist to overcome resistance to change. It can be accomplished through radical change of the executives in charge through termination or reassignment. Organizational consultants can be brought into a stagnant environment to shape a

strategic plan and then assist in the implementation of specific remedies to enhance organizational performance. Individuals can be empowered to make change through personal charisma, leadership skills, technical ability, and political savvy.

President Clinton and Vice President Gore sought to improve the quality and productivity of the federal government in during their term in office. The change was part of the National Performance Review and the movement was called "Reinventing Government." The movement recommended cutting red tape and regulations that slowed the decision making process thereby empowering employees to make decisions while holding them accountable for the results (Denhardt, 1999). Projects and processes are routinely bogged down through convoluted procedures, lack of power and authority to make quick decisions at the level that is most affected by the decision, and unnecessary control of creative and independent thinking.

Executive leaders can overcome resistance by taking the simple, but bold move of removing the roadblock. After self-examination of the core goals of their organization, they restructure the bureaucracy by eliminating positions and functions that do not directly contribute to the success of executive vision (Osborne and Plastrik, 1997).

The application of appropriate rules and consequences can overcome resistance. Personal accountability and distribution of power allow employees to make the right decision for the right reasons (Block, 1996). Frederick Herzberg examined job dissatisfaction, supervision, and motivation of supervisors and subordinates. Increasing employee accountability while at the same time removing some controls by decentralization of authority generates a higher sense of achievement (Thibault, Lynch, and McBride, 1998).

Rules can be used to control behavior, create and define patterns, and limit management and supervisory abuse (Jreisat, 1997). A highly defined bureaucratic structure can be used to overcome resistance by stressing a high degree of conformity through the use of discipline that respond to the individual's sense of devotion to their duties (Merton, 1957).

Rules and consequences have their limitations however. They often do not take into account the variations of human behavior and group dynamics. Social conditions involved in the internal culture of an organization shape employee behavior. The Hawthorne Experiments identified beliefs that make an individual feel integrated into a group which foster the attitude of the group to then behave as a single unit. The norms of behavior can be identified that are detrimental to the organization as a whole, a plan to change them can be instituted and thereby create harmony for the organization and the individual groups (Roethlisberger, 1941).

Individuals can cause change to occur or overcome resistance, through charisma, self-confidence, energy, and the willingness to accept risk. They accomplish this by presenting solid proposals based upon contemporary business practice, establishing open communication through participate decision-making, or by acting as a renegade and going around the end of an obstacle, in violation of most organizational structure (Henry, 1995).

Methodology

The research methodology focused primarily on relevant literature published in the area of public administration and management training. Areas of emphasis included human resource management, organization theory, proactive police management, government reinvention, and leadership. These texts included primary research as well as secondary data analysis.

Scholarly journals and University publications were reviewed for data such as Government Executive, Law and Order, George Mason University, University of Kansas, and the University of Delaware.

Other sources included the New York Times newspaper, organizational consultants who conducted site training at the Department of Public Safety, and Internet research related to instances in history that illustrate the impact of personal choice and resistance to change as a long-standing dilemma.

The researcher's personal perspective as coordinator of the reinvention effort for the Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety Recruitment Unit provided supporting qualitative data to the research. Resistance to change, and the source of that resistance, was discussed in formal meetings with executive officers, managers, and line personnel.

Based upon personal experience from the case study and the subsequent literature review, a research design using primarily qualitative elements was constructed. Supportive data was also derived from a quantitative component in the form of a descriptive survey given to the managers and supervisors of the Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety. The survey gathered data related to the perception of the resistance of

change, the root cause of the resistance, and the ability of personal choice to affect resistance to change.

Limitations of the research

The research sought to examine resistance to change from a narrow perspective in that only one public agency was surveyed for its experience in reinvention and that was further limited to the experience of the recruitment unit. The literature review provided further depth, however the authors covered a wide variety of organizations in size, location, and management structure, both public and private.

Age of the resisters was not used as a research variable, nor was educational background, however length of service was a variable. Time limitations of this project restricted the practicality of obtaining a wider and more detailed quantitative survey analysis and literature review to determine the consistency of resistance to change across multiple organizational environments.

The survey analysis was conducted at the management and supervisory level, excluding line personnel who comprise a significant employee population. The group selected was identified as the most personally connected to the department-wide reinvention effort in general, and the recruitment program specifically, thereby most likely to be in possession of the most relevant data related to this research.

Characteristics of the research sample

The participants were full-time employed members of the Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety, with the exception of one who was now a part-time consultant working for the Sunnyvale city manager's office but had previous full time employment within the Department of Public Safety. Respondents were supervisors and managers who had direct involvement in the citywide reinvention efforts of the past 3 years, and direct or quasi-involvement in the reinvention of the Department's recruitment efforts.

The research sample consisted of the following demographics:

- 6 sworn managers from a total staff of 11 (55 percent)
- 3 civilian managers (all female) from a total staff of 3 (100 percent)
- 5 sworn training unit supervisors from a staff of 6 (83 percent)
- 7 sworn headquarters based line supervisors from a staff of 14 (50 percent)
- 86 percent are male
- 18 years of employment in Sunnyvale on average.

Data Collection

A written questionnaire (Appendix B) was delivered by hand or e-mailed to each participant. The survey contained a brief introduction that asked for participation in a project to determine their experience with, and perception of, resistance to change in the public agencies have they had work in.

Twenty-five respondents were selected to receive the survey and were asked to return the survey within two weeks. Twenty-one surveys were returned for a total

response of 84 percent. Respondents provided their name, rank, position and years of service with the understanding that their names would remain confidential.

Summary of research process

The Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety Resistance to Change Survey consisted of a total of 16 questions broken down into three sub-groups. The first group of five questions discussed the rate of occurrence of resistance, the cause of the resistance, and the relationship of length of service to resistance to change. These questions were designed to elicit a framework for the basic relationship of the individual within a bureaucratic structure and cause and effect of rules and procedures on change.

The second group of four questions discussed the role of the individual in affecting change, and the level of impact personal choice may play in causing, resisting, or shaping change. They were designed to determine what level of change an individual could reasonably expect to exert over a rigid bureaucratic structure versus the effect rules and policies have on shaping behavior.

The last set of seven questions asked the participant to rate their personal perception of how an individual may react upon encountering resistance to change. These were composed to identify the respondent's expectations of human behavior when confronted with change in relationship to their level of compliance or resistance. The respondents were also queried as to their personal behavior related to overcoming resistance and the level to which they will go to affect change.

Using a Likert rating scale of 1 – 5, the participant was asked to select the response that best described their average experience in the particular area. The questions were consistent with the literature review discussing bureaucratic structure and its relationship to the resistance of change, bureaucratic environments that facilitate change, and methods of overcoming resistance to change. The possible responses were:

1. Almost never
2. Seldom
3. Equally
4. Usually
5. Almost always

The survey group was asked to answer the following as it relates to bureaucratic organizational culture and structure:

1. Is resistance to change a common occurrence in public agencies?
2. Is resistance the result of bureaucratic structure, i.e., rules, policies, and chain of command?
3. Does the resistance to change increase with length of service within a bureaucracy?
4. Is a person with few years of service less resistant to change?

The group answered the following regarding personal choice:

1. A single individual can cause significant change to occur within a bureaucracy.
2. A single individual can disrupt change regardless of the intent of the bureaucracy.
3. An individual's personal choice regarding change mostly shapes the organization's future.
4. The rules and policies set forth by the executive office mostly shape the organization's future.

The group answered the following related to their personal perception of overcoming resistance to change:

1. I expect an individual to accept the proposed change and perform their duties as directed.
2. I expect that an individual will not accept change and will conform when rules are applied to the situation.
3. When I encounter resistance I stop my efforts.
4. When I encounter resistance I make several attempts to overcome the resistance.
5. If I cannot overcome resistance, I will go "around the end" to accomplish my goal.
6. Employees will make several attempts to overcome resistance before giving up on the goal.
7. Employees will go "around the end" to overcome resistance to change to accomplish their goal.

FINDINGS

This research project began with qualitative observations made by the author of incidents of resistance to change that occurred during the implementation of the Recruitment Action Plan, primarily from 1998 – 2001. A review of literature related to public sector employment and recruitment, program evaluation, organizational management theory, public administration, and human behavior was conducted to assist first in the formulation of the Action Plan, and then later as a resource to mitigate the resistance that was subsequently encountered.

This formed the framework for the key research questions and theory related to resistance to change as a function of personal choice, and overcoming that resistance through shifting management focus primarily onto the individual, rather than the bureaucratic structure. To develop and support this concept, a descriptive survey was distributed to management and supervisory members of the Department of Public Safety that had been active participants, or intimate observers, of the reinvention plan in the City of Sunnyvale.

The written questionnaire asked the participants to describe their experiences with resistance to change in a bureaucracy and how to overcome that resistance. Those results were collated through quantitative measurement and supported personal choice as a key component of resistance to change and the subsequent success or failure of reinvention efforts.

Resistance to change as a function of bureaucratic structure or personal choice

Literature was varied and plentiful, presenting historical and contemporary examples of resistance to change as a function of bureaucratic structure, burdensome governmental rules and regulations, and constitutional issues related to due process and equity that were cited as significant obstacles to creating and sustaining change in public agencies.

The literature also consistently touched upon the human element of personal choice as a mitigating factor that was difficult to predict or measure, but nonetheless appeared repeatedly as a factor in program success or failure.

Structure as the cause of resistance can be found in managerial habits, multiple layers of management, ineffective delegation, and redundant reviews before a decision can be made. These components create a culture of resistance (Rainey, 1997). Bureaucratic structure and organizational experience are the cause for employees to resist change based upon the belief that by their nature, people are not passive and resistant to organizational needs and they have become so because of the environment in which they must work (McGregor, 1957).

Foundations for this are found in the norms, values, and expectations that develop within a public agency environment. In bureaucracies that adhere to strict rules and find comfort in the historical way of doing things, employees may not seek risk due to possible embarrassment or punishment (Osborne and Plastrik, 1997; Condrey, 1998). Moving organizations in new, innovative directions is difficult and can create significant hurdles for management and society (Rainey, 1997).

The Recruitment Action Plan encountered this bureaucratic resistance to change at several key junctions of the program implementation. The Plan was to be managed jointly between members of the Public Safety staff and Human Resources Department staff. The human resources staff had previously been supporting a recruitment process that had not changed in any significant way for approximately ten years. Despite clear direction from the city manager to radically change the way things had been done in the past, management and staff of the human resources department would frequently meet new ideas with apprehension, and at times outright refusal to cooperate.

Reasons provided revolved around concerns over policy interpretation, potential workload increases, untested ideas that may fail, and rigid adherence to past practice. This negative response and lack of cooperation is reaction by staff members entrenched in the comfort of structure. Change is often met with fear, confusion, and upheaval (Mathis and Jackson, 1997).

The descriptive survey given to the managers and supervisors of the Department of Public Safety indicates that structure is often the cause of resistance to change. Eighty-five percent believed that resistance to change is a common occurrence in public agencies. Twenty percent felt that bureaucratic structure usually was the cause of resistance. No respondent believed that it was almost always the cause.

Forty-five percent thought that there was an equal balance between structure and choice as the most significant factor causing the resistance. Seventy-five percent believed that resistance increases with length of service in a bureaucratic structure. Conversely, sixty-five percent of the respondents stated that employees with less years of service are more open to change. Last, fifty percent of the respondents believed that

the Department of Public Safety was more resistant to change than other agencies they had experienced (Appendix C).

The survey findings indicate that while the majority of the respondents believe resistance to change is a common problem related to bureaucratic structure, they also state that it is not the key element that causes the resistance. Personal choice is cited as a significant factor in resistance to change, which supports the research theory of the individual as the key element.

Literature makes the personal choice connection as well. People have valid reasons to resist change that include the proposed change is inherently a bad idea, it may have a negative financial impact, or it may deteriorate the level of job satisfaction they currently enjoy (Rainey, 1997). Personal choice is a way of looking at life and the approach an individual takes to find their place in the environment. Change requires a shift of paradigm for some that will conflict with what they feel comfortable with (Bennett and Hess, 1996, Iverson, 2002).

Psychological sense of place has been documented in studies of French workers who chose to ignore beneficial change because they felt a deep need to be secure in their perceived role of the organization. The choice they made was ultimately detrimental to themselves, but served a very personal need (Henry, 1995). Personal choice and behavior play an active role in shifting organizational goals and supporting change. Employees learn how to share the vision of their co-workers and increase the sense of cooperation, openness and honesty (Senge, 1990).

The Nobel Prize for economics was awarded to two American collegiate professors who attempted to explain the way people make decisions, combining psychology and

economics. The standard economic theory of choice assumes that individuals will make decisions using their preferences and available information with little change over time or circumstance. Personal choice was the emphasis of the study to determine the cause of, what on the surface, appears to be irrational human behavior (New York Times, 2002).

Can resistance to change be overcome?

Practical experience gained during the implementation of the Recruitment Action Plan supported the research presumption that resistance to change can be overcome. Literature review and survey analysis also provided concurrent examples of the ability for an organization or an individual to overcome resistance to change.

The most frequent type of resistance the Action Plan met with related to the ability of the staff to implement new procedures designed to shorten the timeline of the testing process for entry level officers. The resisters were not comfortable with deviation from past practice and needed repetitive reassurance that rules and regulations were not being violated. Most of the resistance in this area came from human resources personnel who seemed to be more closely tied to their bureaucratic structure, than did the recruitment unit team who were police officers that were more comfortable making quick decisions.

Another area of resistance for the Action Plan was the perception of line officers and supervisors that changes made to the previous recruitment structure related to lowering entry level qualifications, which in turn would lower the overall quality of the department. This resistance to change was swift, passionate, and sustained. Although it has now

subsided to a low rumble, the perception still persists. The method used to overcome this resistance started with a vision statement given by the executive officer, followed by management and supervisory training, and followed-up with informational presentations for the line staff.

Organizational change takes place slowly and requires time to evolve. Making significant change equates to a shift in culture as well. Members will make these changes on a voluntary basis, giving up old habits slowly (Block, 1996; Osborne and Plastrik, 1998). Providing information, clarifying organization goals, mitigating criticism, and allaying fears of error in policy enforcement support an environment that will reduce conflict thereby overcoming resistance to change (Bennett and Hess, 1996).

Overcoming resistance to change occurs in a climate of trust. This can be accomplished if the members of the organization trust the person who is proposing the change based upon that person's skill, relevant expertise, reputation, and integrity (Denhardt, 1999). The effective leader shapes an attainable action plan, explains the purpose of the plan and the desired outcome, and provides the necessary support for the staff to attain that goal.

The results of the survey given to the staff members of the Department of Public Safety indicate that despite the existence of widespread resistance to change, they also see many instances of resistance being overcome. Fifty percent believed that an individual could usually or almost always make significant change regardless of the resistance encountered. Seventy-four percent believed that staff members would usually or almost always accept the change and perform their duties rather than actively resist the change. Ninety percent indicated that when they encounter resistance they

usually or almost always will not stop their efforts, and eighty-four percent stated they would make several attempts to overcome that resistance. Eighty-six percent believed that employees will equally or usually make several attempts to overcome the resistance they encounter (Appendix C). While this last statistic for their subordinates is lower than what the respondents would personally chose to do, it makes the positive nexus that most staff members will actively seek to overcome resistance with multiple attempts.

How is resistance to change overcome?

This concept brings the research full circle and ties directly to the first question asked regarding resistance as a function of structure or personal choice. The literature, practical experience, and historical incidents illustrate differing tactical methods an organization or an individual may employ to overcome resistance. Throughout them all, personal choice was the underlying motivational factor.

The recruitment unit members used a variety of methods to overcome resistance that were developed from the review of professional journals and texts in the areas of public administration, organizational development, and leadership development seminars. The general themes taken from these sources were to shape an attainable action plan, have a collaborative decision-making process involving key stakeholders, and provide accurate information as to the significant milestones of the program.

These ideas were fully supported and driven from the executive office of city hall and the Department of Public Safety. Additionally, several organizational consultants had

provided management systems training to all staff members and the recruitment unit referred staff to those sessions as a guideline for acceptable behavioral change.

When resistance was encountered despite using the above methods, reassurance, clarification, and redirection were employed on multiple occasions to move the plan forward. Even after these efforts, select individuals simply made the personal choice to not participate in the reinvention effort of the recruitment team. This was observed in a variety of areas such as deadlines not being met, memorandums directing action being ignored, e-mails left unanswered, and redundant meetings held for the purpose of hashing over details that had been agreed upon months before. These pitfalls added months and possibly years to the successful implementation of a program that had clear direction from the executive office.

When those methods failed, the most frequently used method to overcome resistance then became the personal choice of going around the object of resistance regardless of bureaucratic structural guidelines. Often, this method was fraught with potential personal liability to the staff member that ignored the chain of command due to possible disciplinary actions. Although discipline was a remote possibility, a more realistic outcome would be anger, frustration, and more resistance.

Literature review supports the theory that an individual's personal choice is the critical factor in determining behavior in complex environments, often overriding any procedures, rules or structure that is in place. Therefore, it is not surprising that staff would choose to go around an obstacle after repeated attempts to comply with bureaucratic structure and methodology.

Employees will, for the most part, do the right thing for the right reasons. Assuming that an organization practices healthy recruitment techniques, then the core of the staff should be competent and fit into the overall organizational culture. When trusted systems fail and resistance to change is tremendous, the individual will become a renegade and go around an obstacle to achieve the desired results. This is usually done at some risk to the individual, which indicates the level of passion that is involved in this personal choice (Henry, 1995).

As organizations change, so too must the members. To ignore or avoid the changing environment, the employee runs the risk of making their existence in the organization irrelevant. When that occurs, the members who have learned to adapt and have acquired the new skills required for success will ignore that individual and go around what they perceive to be a roadblock (Buhl, 2002).

The need for personal choice is powerful and fundamental. Even in the face of rules, regulations, and direct orders an individual will choose to find a way to govern one's own life. The person will, by instinct, choose self-assertion and initiative in deciding whether to comply with an order. The individual controls the outcome (Follett, 1926). The Hawthorne Experiments examined human behavior in the group setting to decipher how and why certain groups chose to behave in variance with the objectives of the organization at large. Social beliefs and personal creeds surfaced as significant factors in individual and group behavior, overriding monetary reward, rules, and punishment (Roethlisberger, 1941).

Psychological safety is important to an individual in that it creates a sense of comfort and equilibrium in their work environment. If significant change is to occur, then the

individual must acknowledge that components of the environment have changed and in doing so, the individual must then make the appropriate behavioral change in order to survive. Psychological safety for that individual lies in the fact that he can accept the proposed change without personal threat or loss of dignity, again a personal choice made with little regard to the facts present in the environment (Schein, 1997).

The enormous variance in personal values, goals and need for satisfaction create a dynamic work environment that cannot be effectively described by classical organizational theory. The bureaucratic structure and its reliance on conformity to rules ignore the well-documented nuances of human behavior. By their nature, people will seek safety, satisfaction, and avoid anything they perceive to be discomforting. Avoidance of rules is a frequent element of human behavior, but may be deemed deviant behavior by a bureaucratic structure (Jreisat, 1997).

History also provides examples of the power of personal choice as it relates to changing environments. Group dynamics, in which individuals come together to form a singular way of thinking, can produce a cohesive and productive outcome, or a juggernaut that ignores critical informational input to their decision-making process that creates dangerous situations. These individuals have made a choice as to how they will process valuable information, regardless of the policy or procedure that may be in place directing the contrary. During World War II, the intelligence staff of Admiral H. E. Kimmel received repeated warnings that the Japanese may attack Pearl Harbor. Despite this accurate information, the individuals involved chose to resist any change to their comfort zone and bureaucratic complacency (Janis, 1971).

Another example from that emerged from World War II involved the strategy choices made by the staff of the U.S Navy's Admiral King. German submarines began to tear apart our supply lines, sinking freighters a few miles off the U.S. eastern coastline. This choice revolved around the different British and American theories on the deployment of aircraft carriers and destroyers to protect the convoys. The U.S. chose to ignore the British recommendations despite accurate information provided to them, and also in the face of the experience of British World War I naval veterans who used the Convoy System to successfully protect their shipping lanes. The result was over 400 ships sunk in about a two-year period (Kelley, 2001, Baker, 2002).

More recently, an FBI field office supervisor in Phoenix, Arizona received detailed memorandums from a senior field agent warning of the possibility that a plot existed to use commercial airliners as weapons against U.S. mainland targets. The agent expressed his concern that foreign men were attending flight schools and there appeared to be a connection to anti-American terrorist groups.

This information was provided in an internal FBI climate, the public would learn later, rife with infighting, bureaucracy, and incompetence related to sharing and acting upon critical information. The supervisor, despite direction from his superiors and ignoring the obvious, made the personal choice to sit on the information and not forward it through the proper channels for action. The result was a terrorist attack in New York in which two airliners were flown into the World Trade Center, collapsing two towers and killing thousands of innocent civilians (Solomon, 2002; Behar, 2002).

The results of the survey given to the Department of Public Safety staff support the theory that personal choice is the more significant variable in overcoming resistance to change. A total of sixty-five percent believed that a single person could cause significant change equally, usually, or almost always. Ninety percent of the time an individual could disrupt changes equally, usually, and almost always. The supervisors and managers believed that they would go "around the end" of an obstacle at least seventy percent of the time equally, usually, and almost always. The same supervisors and managers also believed that their subordinates would also "go around the end" seventy percent of the time equally and usually (25%). None believed they would go around the end almost always (Appendix C).

Summary and areas for further research

The qualitative research results of the case study indicate that resistance to change exists in a bureaucratic environment. Resistance to change was observed in both the structures of the bureaucracy, and as a reflection of personal choice of the staff members participating in the reinvention efforts of the agency. The rules, regulations, expectations, history, and culture of the organization were determined to be deeply rooted, and a powerful force in determining the behavior of staff.

Underlying the inherent cultural expectations of the rigid bureaucratic structure was the impact of individual choice. Throughout the reinvention process, individual behavior was identified as an equal or greater factor in the success or failure of the project overall. Despite clear direction and the potential for repercussion, individuals consistently chose self-interest as a baseline consideration before the bureaucratic rule.

This affinity for personal choice was observed whether the individual chose to support the project and “go around the end” of the obstacle, or chose to not cooperate with the group at large, thus ignoring the chain of command and rules of order.

Literature also provided parallel examples of bureaucratic structure as the primary force that shapes employee behavior. Authors documented this theory from the early twentieth century up to the present, some with conflicting thoughts as to the degree of bureaucratic resistance existing in modern governmental agencies. Throughout these scholarly texts, however, were repeated references to the effect of human behavior in the area of personal physical and psychological safety, self-fulfillment, and personal

choice. Often, these authors would state that the behaviors of the individual were significant enough to warrant further research.

An examination of literature specifically related to human behavior, as opposed to public administration, tended to indicate a stronger relationship to personal choice over structural influence as the overriding factor in resistance to change. This body of work tends to support the intuitive observations made during the reinvention of the recruitment program, and supports the theory of personal choice as the primary means of affecting change for positive or negative outcomes.

The last supportive research stems from the outcome of the employee survey. The results confirm that resistance to change is endemic to public organizations that the employees had experienced. They believed that bureaucratic structure was a strong influence on an individuals flexibility and ability to accept change, however, they indicated that personal choice was the most significant element when it came to understanding why people resist change and how they overcome resistance to change.

Areas for further research

This project forms a limited approach to the study of human behavior within a public organization that is undergoing a reinvention effort. Changing dynamics appear to exist between an individuals' self-awareness and cultural norms, and the expectations and cultural norms of the organization that employees them. Relying on organizational consultants, strategic plans, and executive orders may not be enough to get the job done if the power of the individual to impact the process is not taken into consideration.

The research examined only one agency in its efforts to reinvent a specific program. Further research will need to be done to examine governmental organizations of varying size, operational goals, and staff demographics to determine if similar results exist. Literature can be found to support both the bureaucracy and the individual as the significant variable in resistance to change, however, a more in-depth review can be conducted in the field of psychology related to human behavior in a variety of environments.



APPENDIX A

City of Sunnyvale
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

SWORN EMPLOYEES - Effective: 07/01/02

		Overall Ethnicity		Female Ethnicity		Male Ethnicity	
		%:					
SWORN GENDER/ETHNICIT Y TOTALS:	29 Asian	11.4%	1	5.3%	28	11.9%	
	9 Black	3.5%	1	5.3%	8	3.4%	
	28 Hispanic	11.0%	3	15.8%	25	10.6%	
	3 Nat. Am	1.3%	2	0.8%	1	0.4%	
	181 White	71.3%	12	63.2%	169	71.9%	
	4 Other	1.6%	0	0.0%	4	1.7%	
GENDER TOTALS:			19	8.3%	235	92.5%	

TOTAL EMPLOYEES: 254 **
Total Sworn Employees: 216

SWORN EMPLOYEES - Effective: 07/01/01

		Overall Ethnicity		Female Ethnicity		Male Ethnicity	
		%:					
SWORN GENDER/ETHNICIT Y TOTALS:	25 Asian	10.9%	0	0.0%	25	11.7%	
	8 Black	3.5%	1	6.3%	7	3.3%	
	21 Hispanic	9.2%	5	31.3%	16	7.5%	
	2 Nat. Am	0.9%	1	0.4%	1	0.4%	
	169 White	73.8%	9	56.3%	160	75.1%	
	4 Other	1.7%	0	0.0%	4	1.9%	
SWORN GENDER TOTALS:			16	7.0%	213	93.0%	

TOTAL EMPLOYEES: 229 **
Total Sworn Employees: 205

SWORN EMPLOYEES - Effective: 07/01/00

		Overall Ethnicity		Female Ethnicity		Male Ethnicity	
		%:					
SWORN GENDER/ETHNICIT Y TOTALS:	17 Asian	7.5%	0	0.0%	17	7.9%	
	10 Black	4.4%	0	0.0%	10	4.7%	
	13 Hispanic	5.8%	2	18.2%	11	5.1%	
	1 Nat. Am	0.4%	1	0.4%	0	0.0%	
	183 White	81.0%	8	72.7%	175	81.4%	
	2 Other	0.9%	0	0.0%	2	0.9%	
GENDER TOTALS:			11	4.9%	215	95.1%	

TOTAL EMPLOYEES: 226 **
Total Sworn Employees: 212

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

SWORN EMPLOYEES - Effective: 07/01/99

		Overall Ethnicity		Female Ethnicity		Male Ethnicity	
		%:					
SWORN							
GENDER/ETHNICIT							
Y TOTALS:							
	15 Asian	6.7%	1	14.3%	14	6.4%	
	10 Black	4.4%	0	0.0%	10	4.6%	
	12 Hispanic	5.3%	1	14.3%	11	5.0%	
	0 Nat. Am	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
	187 White	83.1%	5	71.4%	182	83.5%	
	1 Other	0.4%	0	0.0%	1	0.5%	
GENDER TOTALS:			7	3.1%	218	96.9%	

TOTAL EMPLOYEES: 225 **
Total Sworn Employees: 218

SWORN EMPLOYEES - Effective: 07/01/98

		Overall Ethnicity		Female Ethnicity		Male Ethnicity	
		%:					
SWORN							
GENDER/ETHNICIT							
Y TOTALS:							
	11 Asian	5.0%	0	0.0%	11	5.0%	
	8 Black	3.6%	0	0.0%	8	3.7%	
	8 Hispanic	3.6%	0	0.0%	8	3.7%	
	0 Nat. Am	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
	193 White	86.9%	4	100.0%	189	86.7%	
	2 Other	0.9%	0	0.0%	2	0.9%	
GENDER TOTALS:			4	1.8%	218	98.2%	

TOTAL EMPLOYEES: 222 **
Total Sworn Employees: 219

** Includes those currently in training

APPENDIX B

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Participant's name: _____
Years of service in Sunnyvale: _____
Rank/position: _____

Using the following rating scale, circle one of the numbers below each category that best describes your average experience in this area.

- 1 - ALMOST NEVER
- 2 - SELDOM
- 3 - EQUALLY
- 4 - USUALLY
- 5 - ALMOST ALWAYS

Answer the following as it relates to bureaucratic organizational culture and structure:

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Is resistance to change a common occurrence in public agencies? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Is resistance the result of bureaucratic structure, i.e., rules, policies, and chain of command? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Does the resistance to change increase with length of service within a bureaucracy? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Is a person with few years of service less resistant to change? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Compared to other public organizations you have experienced, is this agency more resistant to change? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Answer the following regarding personal choice:

- | | | | | | | |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | A single individual can cause significant change to occur within a bureaucracy. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | A single individual can disrupt change regardless of the intent of the bureaucracy. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | An individual's personal choice regarding change mostly shapes the organization's future. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | The rules and policies set forth by the executive office mostly shape the organization's future. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Answer the following related to your perception of overcoming resistance to change:

- | | | | | | | |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I expect an individual to accept the proposed change and perform their duties as directed. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | I expect that an individual will not accept change and will conform when rules are applied to the situation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | When I encounter resistance I stop my efforts. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | When I encounter resistance I make several attempts to overcome the resistance. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. | If I cannot overcome resistance, I will go "around the end" to accomplish my goal. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

6. Employees will make several attempts to overcome resistance before giving up on the goal. 1 2 3 4 5

7. Employees will go "around the end" to overcome resistance to change to accomplish their goal. 1 2 3 4 5



APPENDIX C

Bureaucratic Organizational Structure

			1		2		3		4		5	
1		1	5%	1	5%	1	5%	11	55%	6	30%	
2		0	0%	7	35%	9	45%	4	20%	0	0%	
3		0	0%	2	10%	3	15%	13	65%	2	10%	
4		1	5%	1	5%	5	25%	11	55%	2	10%	
5		0	0%	1	6%	8	44%	7	39%	2	11%	* 2 N/A

Personal Choice

1		1	5%	6	30%	3	15%	8	40%	2	10%	
2		0	0%	2	10%	4	20%	10	50%	4	20%	
3		0	0%	3	15%	4	20%	10	50%	3	15%	
4		0	0%	4	20%	8	40%	8	40%	0	0%	

Overcoming Resistance to Change

1		0	0%	3	16%	2	11%	11	58%	3	16%	
2		0	0%	5	21%	10	42%	4	17%	5	21%	
3		8	40%	10	50%	1	5%	1	5%	0	0%	
4		1	6%	1	6%	1	6%	10	56%	5	28%	
5		3	14%	3	14%	6	29%	4	19%	5	24%	
6		1	5%	2	9%	10	45%	9	41%	0	0%	
7		1	5%	4	20%	10	50%	5	25%	0	0%	

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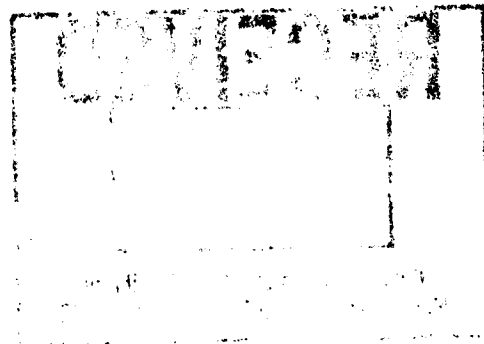
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