Editor's Note

Bramwell Osula
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Welcome to this second issue of the *Journal of Practical Consulting* (JPC). In this issue, we continue our attempt to broaden the definition and understanding of consulting. The articles gathered here reflect on topics that are critical to the practice of consulting. Livit's article, "Are You Really Listening?" alerts us to a problem that clients often raise. As the declared specialists in a particular area, there is always the danger that consultants may take themselves too seriously or be driven by their own particular agendas. The broad messages are that (a) it is not about you; it is about the client and (b) consultants who listen are more likely to be effective.

In "A Brief Examination of the Nature, Contexts, and Causes of Unethical Consultant Behaviors;" the authors explore consulting ethics. Ever since the Enron scandal, we like to think that businesses have been more attentive to issues of values and ethics in business. The consulting profession is not immune from the typical concerns of ethics and could benefit from a closer examination of its practices. Redekop and Heath provide a useful framework discussing consulting ethics and examine some of the causes of unethical consultant behaviors.

In the same way that ethics has become a hot-button topic, so too has diversity in the workplace. Partly inspired by an increasing trend toward globalization, many organizations today find it difficult to ignore the importance of culture in the marketplace. In "Diversity as a Competitive Strategy," Cunningham and Green compare two approaches to the introduction of diversity and suggest ways in which consultants and others might usefully help organizations adapt to the emerging cultural needs of the workplace. The authors identify the practical benefits of cultural awareness to the consulting task and organizational effectiveness.

The fourth article in this issue, "The Tower of Babel and the Rally Driver," examines resistance to change which is a perennial problem that consultants face. Cohen employs a metaphor to drive home important points about overcoming resistance in the workplace.

Each of the broad topics covered here: listening, ethics, diversity, and change warrant a special issue which JPC may consider. We will return to these themes in later issues of JPC. Here, we simply introduce themes that define the broad tasks and challenges of consulting. As part of JPC's commitment to defining and refining the practice of consulting, I invite you to suggest other themes or perhaps submit articles of your own. In many ways, because they represent a diverse group of professionals and introduce innovative and creative ideas on many different levels, consultants are the heralds or shock troops of organizational and cultural change. JPC hopes to capture some of this dynamism and extend the community of practicing consultants. Enjoy this issue, and spread the word!

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Practitioner’s Corner

Are You Really Listening? Delivering What Your Client Really Wants and Needs

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Often the solution to a new assignment is derived instinctually, from preformed ideas on the nature of the problem and its solution. While consultants are supposedly hired for their knowledge and skills, it is also true that some consultants begin an assignment with a solution in mind. This is long before the problem has been fully examined. These preformed or ready-made solutions create at least two problems. First, they inhibit creativity; and, second, they do not truly address the issue. A one-size problem does not fit all. The greatest skills a consultant can possess are the abilities to approach a job with an open mind, to assemble and decipher appropriate clues, and to actively listen and hear what the client really needs and wants.

An open mind entails approaching an assignment without bias. The system you selected for your last assignment may not be the perfect solution for this one. Be open to other approaches and solutions. Do not pick a solution because it is safe; choose one because you have fully studied the problem, collected all pertinent data, interviewed a cross section of key parties, and considered a number of alternative approaches. Consulting without bias requires that you set aside your ego, expectations, and prejudices and really hear what your client is asking. So, how do you hear your clients’ needs? You hear your clients’ needs by communicating with them early, continually, and frequently. Communication should be initiated in the earliest stages of planning and continued throughout the duration of the project. The consultant forges a clear understanding of problems, and users have a clear understanding of what the solution will achieve (Davis, 1989).

A few years ago, I worked for a nonprofit organization where it was decided to automate the data collected from clients. We hoped to be able to use this information to generate statistics and data that we could then present to government and private organizations for fundraising purposes. We met with several consultants to discuss our needs and to gather expert opinion on the best system to meet our needs. It has been a few years, but I can clearly remember one particular consultant who came in making all sorts of promises to increase our fundraising capacity with the installation of his “wonder” system which he could have up and running in all

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of our offices in a matter of 3 to 6 months. It sounded good, almost too good. We decided to hire him to work his promised magic.

During the assessment and solution designing stages, he gathered the documents from the manual process. He conducted countless interviews, created fancy data flow charts, and participated in our technology committee meetings. There was note taking, document gathering, and nodding in agreement. In the end, the project was delivered with a great deal of fanfare but with little substance and little ability to fulfill our needs. What we discovered later was that he had delivered to us almost an exact copy of the system he had delivered to another nonprofit organization in a prior assignment. The problem here was that the only things the two organizations had in common were that they were both nonprofits and that they both needed to do fundraising (show me a nonprofit agency that does not have this very basic need). The system worked quite well for the first group but was woefully inadequate for ours. The hours of planning, note taking, document gathering, and interviewing were wasted; the consultant came to us with a solution before he ever heard our problem. Bias, ignorance, and the inability to listen resulted in an abandoned project. Fortunately for us, the new consultant we hired was truly skilled at listening to his clients.

Recently, a good friend of mine consulted with a career counselor because she had reached a point in her professional life where she felt she could benefit from the wisdom of an expert in the field because she was interested in switching careers. She had not received career counseling in many years but remembered enough to have an idea of what to expect during the data collection phase. She expected to take a variety of tests such as the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory or other tests designed to determine her areas of interest and aptitude. She also expected to have at least one fairly in-depth interview during which she would be asked a variety of questions. Finally, she expected to have a wrap-up session where she would receive an oral and written report with the consultant’s career path recommendation. In reality, no tests were taken, and the interview process was lacking as well. There was little depth, little information gathering (listening), and lots of speech making by the consultant. In fact, there were several times during the interview process when the counselor interrupted her client’s responses to either move onto the next question or to interject her own story into the conversation. The final report was not based on even the minimum information that was gathered; it seemed to be based on a one-size-fits-all prewritten report that the career counselor had probably given to many if not all of her clients. It did not reflect my friend’s interests, education, or aptitude. It is obvious that the consultant’s ability to listen to her client was extremely deficient; it is less clear whether incompetence, fraud, or bias were also problems.

In both examples, we can see how ineffective listening skills caused the projects to fail. How do you ensure that you are truly hearing what your clients want? The answer is simple and yet quite complex: you hear them by listening and hearing what the client has to say without projecting your own feelings or ideas. There are two primary methods for effective listening: reflective and active listening. Reflective listening is perhaps most appropriate in a counseling communication exchange because it focuses on listening and reflecting empathy back to the subject. On the other hand, active listening is appropriate in all communication exchanges because it focuses on truly hearing and listening to the speaker and provides the tools that can help anyone improve their listening skills. What is active listening, and how do you use it? Active listening requires that you remain focused on the conversation (Fogarty & Perkins, 2005). You fully listen to the speaker, giving your complete attention. Catching yourself when your mind starts to wander to other topics or even when you stop listening to start preparing responses

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is important. Parroting the key items back to the client to ensure you are fully grasping the important factors can help. Ask probing questions (why, how, when) to further engage the speaker, encouraging further dialogue and expansion on unclear or incomplete areas. Listen with your entire body; by making eye contact, facing the speaker, and sitting erect with minimal fidgeting. Take queues from the body language of the speaker to hear the hidden messages. Is he or she exhibiting signs of anxiety by fidgeting or speaking too softly or quickly? Listening and watching for these clues will allow you to respond with feedback that can help calm the speaker and encourage the flow of dialogue.

So, how do you actively listen and take notes at the same time? How do you focus all your attention to hearing what the client is saying and not thinking ahead to the follow-up questions or any preliminary suggestions you might have? The answer is simple: you do not. While the speaker is speaking; jot down the key phrases or words and let them go, returning to the active conversation. Resist the urge to start planning and answering and focus on drawing the speaker out even further with your probing questions. When pauses in the conversation naturally occur, ask for a few moments to jot down some notes and then resume with follow-up questions or feedback to the earlier answers to allow for further elaboration or to show that you understand the point the speaker was making (confirmation that you have mutual understanding). Conclude the meeting with a summary of what you have learned from the speaker, this will provide an opportunity for correction, clarification, and further note taking. Once you have left the client, this is the time to fully flush out the details of your notes. It is important to do this while the details are still fresh in your memory, so take care of this as soon as possible.

Now that you have all of this great information, what do you do with it? Read it, digest it, and use it to develop and implement solutions that deliver exactly what the client wants and needs. A successful project is not simply one you are able to complete, but one that is actually implemented and used by the client. By incorporating active listening in all of your exchanges; you will increase communication, understanding, and satisfaction and see an improvement in your consulting relationships.

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A Brief Examination of the Nature, Contexts, and Causes of Unethical Consultant Behaviors

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This article builds on existing published research as well as recent interviews with consultants to explore some of the root causes of unethical behavior by consultants. The authors suggest that the very aims of consulting—aims which are rooted in scientific management and involve making production processes more rational, efficient, and profitable—are potentially in conflict with the treatment of human beings as ends in themselves and not merely as means to others' ends. And, if the primary goal and self-understanding of consulting work is simply to create wealth in the context of short-term relationships—a goal and self-understanding that is also rooted in the origins of management consulting—then unethical behavior can all too easily be the result. Furthermore, because of their position as expert outsiders, consultants can find it relatively easily to manipulate and overcharge clients, while clients can use consultants for their own unsavory purposes. The moral value of duty towards clients and the need to build a trust relationship with them can serve as rationalizations for unethical actions done by consultants on behalf of clients. The article includes suggestions for consultants who want to avoid unethical behavior and enhance the credibility of the profession.

Unethical behavior is a fact of life in the business world just as it is in other domains. In this article, we explore the nature and context of unethical behaviors by consultants and offer hypotheses as to why such behaviors occur. Our aim is to provide an analysis of some (but by no means all) unethical behaviors by consultants and to isolate distinct kinds of bad behavior that are particularly related to the consulting profession (i.e., those bad behaviors that result from the activities and services that consultants provide and the position that consultants occupy in the world of business and nonprofit organizations). We thus believe that although the activities performed by people who call themselves consultants are quite diverse (Massey, 2000), there are nevertheless some common core elements of consulting work that provide a unique context for deviant behavior.

Although there is a widespread sense that some consultants engage in unethical practices as a matter of course, remarkably little research and analysis has been done to measure the dimensions and scope of the problem and to understand its causes. The work that has been done

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has painted a fairly sobering picture. For example, Allen and Davis (1993) found, in a broadly-based study of business consultants' ethical views, that "while a consultant can maintain high personal and professional values which are positively related to professional ethics, they somehow disintegrate when actual ethical dilemmas are faced in the marketplace" (p. 456). By their own admission, consultants' ethical beliefs are not necessarily reflected in their behavior. The question then becomes, what is the cause of this disconnect?

Rather than claiming to offer definitive answers to this question, this article explores the broad outlines of the topic and offers some insights and suggestions for those in the industry who genuinely want to avoid unethical behavior and enhance the credibility of the consulting profession. It represents a report on research in progress based on existing published research and qualitative interviews with working consultants from a variety of firms and fields.[1]

An Emerging Profession with Some Fundamental Ethical Challenges

The consulting industry is relatively young; most researchers date its beginnings to Frederick Taylor's *Scientific Management*, first published in 1911. It is on its way to becoming a profession, albeit a loosely-affiliated one as befits such a diverse enterprise. As in any developing profession, a certain amount of chicanery and charlatanism are to be expected; one only needs to consider the history of the medical profession for an instructive example. As Kubr (1980) put it,

> In its early years the [consulting] business attracted the good, the bad and the indifferent . . . . Professional awareness and behavior come when the early juggling with a little knowledge gives way to skilled application of a generally accepted body of knowledge according to acknowledged standards of integrity. (p. 45)

Judging by recent critiques (e.g. O'Shea & Madigan, 1998; Pinault, 2001; Wyatt, 2004), those early days may not yet be over. Allen and Davis (1993) suggested that "the field of professional consulting has a long way to go to arrive at the promised land [of ethical behavior]" (p. 456). If one chooses to take the long view, consulting as a unique profession is simply undergoing the long and arduous process of standardization and professionalization that all advanced, specialized fields of endeavor must pass through.

Yet, from the beginning, as can be seen from Taylor's (1911/1998) seminal work, the kind of work that would come to be engaged in by business consultants presents some fundamental ethical challenges. In advocating a scientific approach to production and management in which all tasks are quantified, measured, and rationalized into a coherent and efficient system; Taylor, in essence, presented human beings as machines or parts of machines. He was quite clear that the changes he advocated involve removing responsibility and judgment (fundamentally human qualities) from the workers and placing them in the hands of management. Workers were pictured as stupid and unable to perform tasks adequately without

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[1] Six consultants representing a wide range of experiences, firms, and backgrounds have been interviewed thus far for this project (more interviews are planned). The interviewees represent both sexes, with an age range between 22 and 31. As young working consultants relatively new to the professions; our interviewees exhibit, we believe, a view "from the trenches" that is highly illuminating. The mean consulting experience of those interviewed was 3.5 years, and the mean age was 26. The identities of the consultants interviewed have been kept confidential in order for them to be more open about their experiences and to protect their jobs. At no point were particular cases, names, or dates discussed that would violate any company policies or procedures.

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supervision. The new, more efficient, standardized methods must be "enforced" (p. 41) by managers; while the "mental attitude" (p. 51) of workers must undergo a "complete change . . . toward their work and toward their employers" (p. 51), an attitude change engineered by managers. Workers need to be scientifically selected for their ability to work like machines, while it is left to the managers to find ways to get workers motivated to work in the most efficient way possible.

We have become so inured to the rationalizing logic of industrial capitalism that the ethical dilemma in all of this may not immediately be clear. But, the dilemma is really very simple: human beings are not machines. While Taylor's approach and at least some of his methods remain accepted as ways to increase efficiency and productivity, they are premised on the notion that human beings (workers) are simply means to an end, rather than ends in themselves as the moral philosopher Immanuel Kant (1981) suggested and as most of us in fact view ourselves. Thus; the efficiency expert, the consultant who is going to help a company cut costs and make more money, is often charged with the task of eliminating positions or rationalizing worker activities in ways that may violate the fundamental Kantian moral principle, intuitively obvious to most of us, always to treat people not merely as means but also as ends in themselves.

While company managers in principle bear the responsibility for any changes that are made and *how* they are made, the particular dilemma for consultants is that they are outsiders who are called in to provide the objective (i.e., scientific) advice that will help the company's bottom line but may also introduce pain and strife into the firm. They are the change agents and, perhaps, the scapegoats (Kakabadse, Louchart, & Kakabadse, 2006). They must live with this knowledge and rationalize it in some way or another if they are to retain their own sense of integrity.

Duty to Clients – An Unconditional Good?

How do they do it? Understandably enough, they do it by invoking another moral principle: duty. In our interviews with practicing consultants (quoted anonymously), duty to the client above all else emerges as a fairly common theme. Consultant F (personal communication, October 31, 2006), for example, stated that "the client is reaching out to you as an expert. The manner in which they handle the sensitive issues is theirs to deal with. Your job is to help them meet a goal." Another consultant (Consultant E, personal communication, November 8, 2006) put it this way: "As a consultant, we are paid to satisfy the client; and, if the client requests that we do not go into great detail with its employees, then it is not my duty to say otherwise." In other words, consultants have a duty to their clients as customers that supersedes their duty as human beings to treat other people as ends and not merely as means.

Consultant E (personal communication, November 8, 2006) suggested a further dilemma faced by consultants: they may be asked by clients to lie to company employees. Many of the consultants we have thus far interviewed mentioned that clients regularly ask them to lie or not tell the whole truth when working with company employees. For example, consultants have been instructed to tell a worker that they are there to monitor a production process when, in reality, they were really being asked to determine if and how much work the employee was actually doing (Consultant A, personal communication, October 27, 2006). While there is nothing wrong with monitoring employee productivity, deceiving an employee in order to get an accurate assessment of their output and/or work habits is still wrong in almost any moral system. Why

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should anyone have to lie as a matter of course in their daily work to achieve a task that in itself is morally unobjectionable? The best available rationalization, it seems, is the moral principle of duty, an important moral concept that nevertheless has obvious limitations. Where do we draw the line between trivial and nontrivial unethical acts undertaken out of a sense of duty?

However we choose to answer this question, the fact remains that consultants, because of their outsider status, are particularly susceptible to being put in situations where they will experience a conflict between their personal moral beliefs and the demands of the job. Hired gun, mercenary, or axeman may be melodramatic analogies; but they get the point across and are sometimes invoked, albeit uncomfortably, by consultants themselves (Kakabadse et al., 2006). It is a time-honored business practice that the dirty work is farmed out to outsiders, not only for practical reasons but for reasons of moral comfort as well. “It is no secret that management consultants are sometimes called in to provide cover for executives who don’t want to carry the weight of unsavory decisions” (O’Shea & Madigan, 1998, p. 8). Long-term, face-to-face relationships mitigate bad behavior; while short-term, impersonal, and objective encounters—and it is an important part of the consultant’s brief to be detached and objective (Association of Management Consulting Firms, 2007; Institute of Management Consultants USA, 2007; Kubr, 1980)—provide a fertile context for actions that one may not feel comfortable doing among people with whom one interacts on a long-term basis.

The Problem of Trust

The poignancy of the moral position in which consultants can find themselves is illustrated by the oft-repeated injunction to build a relationship of trust with the client and to put the client’s interests first. “You’ve got to earn your client’s trust! Without that, none of [the common ambitions of consultants that have been listed] can be realized” (Maister, Green, & Galford, 2000, p. xi). Consultants must be able “to create a climate where clients feel that they can trust the consultant” (Kakabadse et al., 2006, p. 427); but to get to that stage, “the consultant is to provide exclusive and sole attention to the client and his objectives. . . . Consultants should place the client’s interest ahead of theirs” (Kakabadse et al., p. 427). Almost every consultant we have interviewed mentioned the importance of gaining the client’s trust, and some consulting codes of ethics state that the client’s interests should be put ahead of the consultant’s (e.g., Kubr, 1980). But, if always putting a client’s interest ahead of the consultant’s is an absolute value, does that not mean that a consultant could end up being used as a means to ends that he or she finds morally repugnant?

In *The Trusted Advisor* (Maister et al., 2000), the authors confronted the fact that a genuine trust relationship (i.e., one that goes both ways) may sometimes be impossible to attain. They suggested that if there is a conflict in outlook or interest between the client and consultant, the consultant may well want to consider terminating the contract. This is an injunction that one rarely sees in the consulting literature, but it is a logical (and indeed laudable) outcome of facing up to the fact that it may not always be possible to align one’s values with those of one’s clients. As ethicists are apt to emphasize; moral actions, as often as not, bring costs to the moral actor. Whistleblowers, for example, know all too well that moral behavior often comes with a profoundly expensive price tag (see Alford, 2001 for an insightful analysis of the physical and psychological punishments inflicted upon whistleblowers). If commercial gain is one’s overriding motivation, then moral behavior is going to take a back seat. This brings us to one of the fundamental sources of bad behavior by consultants: greed coupled with little accountability.

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Greed – A Fundamental Driver of Bad Behavior

It is not that consultants are necessarily greedier than anyone else, it is only that they are in a unique position to capitalize on it. Recent exposés of the consulting industry have highlighted the myriad of ways in which greedy consultants can use their position as experts to maximize their revenue regardless of client needs (e.g., O'Shea & Madigan, 1998; Pinault, 2001). Pinault's memoir *Consulting Demons* portrays an industry that is brilliantly inventive at bilking clients by preying on client fears and weaknesses for its own financial gain. According to Pinault, a former consultant with a wide range of experience in a variety of major firms, consultants serve only one master—themselves; and their ultimate goal is to maximize billings rather than identifying and solving client problems. The latter is often more of a byproduct of consulting work than its core, as described in Pinault's disturbing (albeit anecdotal) account (see also Kakabdase et al., 2006).

While critics like Pinault (2001) do not ignore the fact that consultants work terribly hard and often do much good; they seek to highlight the abuses that, to them, seem rampant in the industry. According to Pinault, in addition to their positive attributes,

> Consultants can. . . be described as efficiency drones, headcounting cannibals, surface-skimming masters of pretense, spies and data-fabricators, threat mongers and opportunists, hit and run specialists, [and] experts in no industry but the promotion of their own expanded sales and well-being. (p. 3)

And, it bears repeating, the fundamental driver of most of this bad behavior is greed: how to get the most out of clients, regardless of client need. "Simply put, consulting is at its most organized, intimidating best when it is working to maximize its take from the client" (Pinault, p. 2). What else can justify the significant stresses and strains of a typical consultant's life, spent in airports and motels and conference rooms and rental cars? "Money, of course, is many consultants' answer to why bearing the inherent stresses and shallow satisfactions of the work is worthwhile" (Pinault, p. 171).

While desire for wealth and all that it brings is nearly universal, consultants are in a unique position to capitalize on it. Consultants are typically called in to solve problems, that is when clients (or potential clients) are the most vulnerable. Things are not going according to plan, and help is needed. Jobs and careers may be on the line. The consultants are the white knights who claim to (and indeed may) have a solution and who allow embattled managers to claim that they are doing something about a problem (Kakabadse et al., 2006; O'Shea & Madigan, 1998). As such, consultants are in a position to exploit client fears and gain client confidences and inside information, all the while recommending solutions that they may already have developed in work for other clients. Pinault (2001) emphasized the many ways that consultants can exploit client fears in order to extend consulting contracts, while offering solutions to client problems that other clients have paid them to develop. "A disturbing amount of material derived from work for competing companies will routinely turn up on work for another, even on work for competing companies in the same industry" (p. 247). Consultants are hence put into a paradoxical position, in the view of some researchers: "Business consultants must provide their clients with new and creative solutions to problems which are not new and to which solutions are known by everyone" (Kakabadse et al., p. 424). Even though the application of known solutions is in itself not unethical, an unsavory quality is usually attached to such actions.

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> The problem is that what consulting has to sell isn't always new, and certainly isn't always fresh. It is an unusual industry because it builds its knowledge base at the expense of its clients. . . . It is not too much of a stretch to say that consulting companies make a lot of money collecting experience from their clients, which they turn around and sell in other forms, sometimes not very well disguised, to other clients. (O'Shea & Madigan, p. 13)

While doing so is not unnecessarily unethical, it would seem to become unethical when the services are sold (at a very high cost) as being new and unique to the client.

Expert Power

Consultants have what leadership theorists call expert power. "A major source of personal power is expertise in solving problems and performing important tasks. . . . Dependency is increased when the target person [the client] cannot easily find another source of advice besides the agent" (Yukl, 2003, p. 10). Thus, if on the one hand, consultants may be called in as powerful experts to help fight internal political battles (itself a dubious calling), they may also be able to gain their own particular advantage from the expertise they bring to the situations in which they find themselves (Kakabadse et al., 2006; Kubr, 1980). Given that they are the experts, and clients tend not to know as much as consultants do about the issue in question (that is the whole point of hiring a consultant), and secrecy and confidentiality surround many consulting interventions; there is little chance that consultants will be caught if they decide to swag some numbers in a regression analysis, for example (Consultant F, personal communication, October 31, 2006). In fact, most of the consultants we have interviewed asserted that a major reason for unethical behavior among consultants is simply that, given the circumstances, it is easy to get away with dishonest behavior of whatever kind. Even if they are caught, the consequences are minimal. Fallacious figures that are cited in an initial report, used to gain a consulting contract, can always be fixed later when the final report is submitted (Consultant B, personal communication, November 6, 2006). Studies have shown that IT consultants "were much more likely to implement projects with known problems when the problems were known only to the consulting firm employees" (Ayers & Kaplan, 2005, p. 123).

Economists call this flexing of expert power the principal-agent problem, and it is not limited to consultants. Any professional who is called upon to provide expert advice may find it easy to abuse their superior position because the very thing that they trade in (expert knowledge) is in a sense hidden from their clients. In a competitive environment where noncompete clauses are a fundamental feature of employment contracts, there is little chance that any two companies are going to know each other's problems and how they are being solved in any depth. Therein lies a great temptation for consultants to spend more time than is necessary gathering data when they have a good idea of both the problem and their own recommended solution. Does this mean that consultants are necessarily going to behave this way? Of course not. Our point is simply that, like other professionals and perhaps more so than some of them, consultants are presented with an opportunity for unethical behavior that can be too tempting to pass up.

The Question of Motivation

Clearly, there is more going on than the abuse of expert power. There is also the fundamental question of consultants' motivations. As we have already suggested, if the supreme

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ideal is making money; then no matter what the enterprise or field of endeavor, bad behavior is going to be an inevitable outcome of attempting to reach that goal. The potential structural problem for consultants in this regard is that, going back to Taylor (1911/1998), the consulting enterprise (management consulting in particular) is aimed at helping firms become more efficient and make more money. Physicians, a group that has been known to enjoy the trappings of wealth and power, by and large also tend to be motivated to help sick people. Businesses are certainly about making money, but most of them also create products and provide services that enhance human welfare in some fundamental way. Academics can claim to be interested in ideas and advancing knowledge, and they can point to measly incomes as proof of their otherworldly concerns. What ideals do consultants serve besides helping their clients make more money, not fail, or take over an industry? Despite the fact that consultants can rightly claim to do all kinds of good in the world, the core definition of a consultant is someone who comes in and fixes someone else's problems before moving on (Kubr, 1980), and that someone else is usually not a poor homeless person.

One view is that the core ideal of the consultant is commercial wealth creation, both for themselves and their clients. Indeed, it has been claimed that it was the influx of commercially-minded (and less-than-ethical) consultants and the expansion of consulting services that helped bring about the demise of the once-venerable accounting firm Arthur Andersen. In the view of Wyatt (2004); the accounting profession, which was imbued with certain longstanding ethical ideals, was in essence corrupted by a culture of wealth creation that went with the rise of consulting services. According to Wyatt, by the 1990s, "consulting revenues had relegated the traditional accounting and tax revenues to a subsidiary role. . . . In retrospect, it is easy to see the greed factor at work" (p. 49). The profession-wide influx of consulting personnel into accounting firms, with their commercial values and lack of ethical training, had a "significant impact. . . on changing the internal culture of the accounting firms. . . and led to the demise of Andersen" (Wyatt, pp. 50-51). According to Gendron, Suddaby, and Lam (2006); "US data indicates that while consulting in 1990 represented 26% of the total revenue of the largest accounting firms, this proportion increased to 49% in 1999" (p. 174). In Wyatt's view, accounting firms "need to evaluate the cost to their culture of introducing individuals [he clearly means consultants] who have no understanding of the significance of accounting professionalism and the importance of ethical behavior" (p. 52; see also Gendron et al. and Maury, 2000).

This particular critique, in some ways, goes to the core of the ethical problem for consultants: a problem of motive, role, and self-definition. We all go to work to make money. But, if that is all we go to work for, to serve mammon and nothing else, and if the kind of work we do is both lucrative and at the same time very open to ethical misconduct with few chances of getting caught or consequences; if we *do* get caught, then it should come as no surprise that bad behaviors are going to result. Viewed from this perspective, one of the structural enablers of unethical behaviors by consultants is both its fundamental goal and its success at achieving that goal: wealth creation. Consulting services by all accounts are now a more than $100 billion industry. In some respects, like Arthur Andersen, the consulting industry may be falling victim to its own staggering financial success. Secondly, such an industry is obviously going to become very attractive for individuals without scruples who simply want to make a lot of money in whatever way they can.

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The Consultant's Role

By discussing such critical perspectives, we do not intend to imply that they accurately characterize the consulting industry as a whole or to impugn the very good motives and deeds exhibited by consultants the world over on a daily basis. Consultants perform a variety of functions and think of their role in a variety of ways; using metaphors including, among others, pilot, gardener, and guide (Kakabadse et al., 2006; Pellegrini, 2002). Some researchers have suggested that some consultants play a role not unlike that of lawyers (O'Shea & Madigan, 1998), while others have suggested that consultants are like physiotherapists (Kubr, 1980). Kakabadse et al. found that business consultants "appear very much focused on helping clients and moving them forward rather than taking advantage of a dominant position and increasing uncertainty in managers' environments" (p. 480; see also Pellegrini). Helping others is a laudable moral ideal that provides meaning and can help to mitigate unethical behavior; but, as we have already suggested, if the client who is being helped is actually a powerful organization that pushes a consultant to do unethical things in the name of financial gain, then the role of helper can actually become a deviant one.

If deviant behaviors can be caused by pressures from clients as well as by the self-serving aims of consultants themselves, another cause of consulting deviance is the awkward position in which consultants find themselves as they attempt to mediate between the demands of their consulting firms and those of their clients. Consultants, who in many cases are literally in a no–man's-land between firm and client, may feel forced into unethical behavior by the conflicting demands of their position. Consultants we have interviewed have been asked to lie about data presented to clients (Consultant F, personal communication, October 31, 2006) and about the level of their own experience (Consultant B, personal communication, November 6, 2006). Consultant E (personal communication, November 8, 2006) commented that there is such high pressure to perform that consultants rarely want to admit fault and would rather falsify data than redo analyses which would take too much time. While pressure from above is often the source of deviant behaviors in all kinds of situations and is not unique to consulting, the fact that consultants are given the task of pleasing both clients and their own firm results in a delicate balancing act that can often lead to ambiguities and tensions that may result in unethical behavior (Kakabadse et al., 2006).

Conclusion

In this article, we have sought to highlight some of the structural factors that help to explain deviant behavior by consultants and why it is that consulting is viewed with suspicion by many people. Because of their position as expert outsiders, consultants can be used by clients to engage in unethical behaviors; while, at the same time, find it relatively easy to deceive and overcharge clients on their own. Pressure from their own firms and their mediator role between firm and client can put consultants in a difficult position in which bad behavior is perceived to be the only (or, perhaps, best) way out of the situation.

In addition, the very aim of consulting, an aim which goes back to its roots in scientific management, is potentially in conflict with the treatment of human beings as ends in themselves and not merely means to others' ends. Likewise, if the primary goal and self-understanding of consulting work is simply to make money in short-term relationships, a goal and self-understanding that is also rooted in the origins of management consulting, then unethical

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behavior can all too easily be ignored or justified in one way or another. And, while the moral ideals of duty and helping others are laudable motivators, they can also help to rationalize unethical behavior. As Kubr (1980) suggested, consultants may want to develop broader goals and ideals beyond that of simply helping clients.

> Are [consultants] responsible merely to the clients who pay them for their advice or is their responsibility broader? . . . Professional management consultants. . . have to make client managers sensitive to the social consequences of various decisions that may be taken as a result of consulting assignments. (p. 49)

Beyond the concern to treat other human beings in an ethical manner, moral actors also have a growing responsibility to take environmental concerns into account when making decisions; and consultants are no more exempt from this responsibility than anyone else.

Thus, for their own well-being as well as the well-being of the industry, consultants may want to reflect further upon their mission in the world beyond financial success (whether of their clients or themselves) and develop core ideals and values that at times may even cause them to turn down contracts and cut short otherwise lucrative engagements. Firms may want to advertise the kinds of work they will *not* do as well as the kind of tasks that they *will* do. Such behaviors, if done consistently and sincerely, will exact a financial cost; but, on the other hand, they may help to enhance trust and actually augment the bottom line.

> Those professionals who apply trust most successfully are those who are at ease with concepts like: Do well by doing good; What goes around comes around; You get back what you put in; Use it or lose it. These maxims are ways of suggesting that success comes to those who have chosen *not* to make success their primary goal. The way to be as rich as Bill Gates is to care more about writing code than about being rich. And the way to be a great advisor is to care about your client. (Maister et al., 2000, p. 14)

If caring about one's client also includes caring about them as moral beings and being willing to engage them in that capacity, then we can agree with this statement.

When it comes to the abuse of expert power, Allen and Davis (1993) suggested that "more stringent methods of self-regulation appear to be warranted if alleged charges of misusing professional ethical status to take advantage of clients prove to be factual" (p. 451). Such self-regulation may include new or enhanced codes of conduct. But, as Allen and Davis suggested, "Unless ethical codes and policies are consistently reinforced with a significant reward and punishment structure and are truly integrated into the business culture, these mechanisms would be of limited value in actually regulating ethical conduct" (p. 456). On one hand, it seems difficult to imagine how consultants could be regulated by outsiders in a thorough and meaningful way without imposing huge costs on both consultants and government agencies; on the other hand, much of the business world does have to cope with fairly strict regulatory regimes and is able to survive and prosper. So, there is no reason to think that more external regulation of consulting work is entirely out of the question. Certainly, the profession will want to continue to develop methods of credentialing and self-governance that enhance its reputation and encourage ethical behavior by its members. At the very least, consultants need to recognize that they possess considerable expert power; and power tends to be a corrupting force unless precautions are taken to limit and control it, especially when that power is coupled with the all-too-human desire for wealth and comfort and when the chances of getting caught or punished for bad behavior are minimal—a potent brew indeed.

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Diversity as a Competitive Strategy in the Workplace

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The purpose of this study is to explore diversity issues in a corporate environment through the use of the comparative case study method. Case examples of two companies, IBM and Monitor Company, are evaluated using comparative analysis. The study demonstrates that diversity strategy can have an enormous impact on a company's bottom-line and development. The study is significant because as organizations become more culturally diverse, the ability to efficiently manage this transition will likely result in competitive advantages in the marketplace.

With the ever increasing demands of global competition, many organizations are redefining their diversity strategies. While *diversity* simply means difference or variety, it takes on various meanings depending on the context in which it is used. Parvis (2003) stated, "If you spend a few minutes of your time looking up the word *diversity* in the dictionary you will find that the focus is on difference. In other words, the presence of differences is the first definition of diversity" (p. 37). Parvis further noted that most experts focus on diversity as it relates to distinctive characteristics which include race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, nation of origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical abilities, occupation, and class. These varying factors cannot be ignored in the workplace. In an increasingly global community; companies will manage staff, whether current or prospective, from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

Because of antidiscriminatory laws in the United States, more companies can be assured a likely pool of heterogeneous employees. Davidson (1999) claimed, "Above all, given the changes in today's world, we need to live our lives, and manage our workplaces to promote the benefits of diversity for humankind now and the generation to come" (p. 1). Unfortunately, most businesses ignore the consequences of global and local demographic changes on their business operations. Obviously, different organizations are at varying stages in this transformation of understanding the ramifications of diversity. Consequently, some organizations continue to stumble on diversity issues. Based on this situation, organizational leaders should implement diversity initiatives in efforts to motivate and encourage employees to work more effectively with others. This will augur well for companies, placing them in a strong position to compete in an increasingly diverse marketplace.

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Going in Two Different Directions

IBM

International Business Machines (IBM) is the world's top provider of computer products and services. Among the leaders in almost every market in which it competes, the company makes mainframes and servers, storage systems, and peripherals. Founded in the 1800s, IBM is an international company with operations in Canada, South America, and other key locations. IBM's service component is the largest in the world. It is the second largest provider of software; it also provides semiconductors. With over 329,373 employees worldwide; the company continues to use acquisitions to augment its software and service businesses, while streamlining its hardware operations with divestitures and organizational shifts (Hoovers.com, 2006a).

Monitor Company

Monitor Company, which does business as Monitor Group, is a strategy consulting firm that provides a variety of management and advisory services and assists companies with their top critical issues over the long term. Founded in 1982; the company operates companies including Action Company, Innovation Management, and Monitor Executive Development. The company also offers financial advisory, investment banking services, data analysis, and enterprise management applications (Hoovers.com, 2006b).

Clemons and McLaughlin (2004) argued that a diversity program will be effective if it is designed to assist the employer in achieving its overall business mission. They explained, "By aligning the goals of diversity with the goals of the organization, it is much more likely that the diversity will be integrated into the culture of the organization and not fall by the wayside over time" (p. 32). Therefore, diversity training should be an important part of employment training programs because implementing such programs is a commitment, but one that will be well worth the effort in the long run. Unfortunately, many organizations are not successful in their diversity initiatives because their actions conflict with their words. They promote diversity in words, but their actions are conflicting. They lose their employees' trust. Simons (1999) argued that the divergence between a leader's words and his or her actions have a profound impact on followers. This inconsistency renders a leader untrustworthy. Therefore, Clemons and McLaughlin's "alignment of goals of diversity" (p. 32) becomes problematic to many organizational leaders

Assessing Diversity

For many organizations, assessing diversity is a journey into uncharted waters. Monitor Company and IBM went about assessing diversity in a similar manner. They initiated a formal diversity program in the organization. Monitor Company commissioned a diversity network led by two key directors in order to bring together those concerned and to lead efforts to enhance diversity. In contrast, IBM's CEO Louis Gerstner launched a diversity task-force initiative to uncover and understand differences among the groups represented in the company and find ways to appeal to a broader set of employees and customers. This became a cornerstone of IBM's human resources strategy.

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Living in Harmony

Monitor Company has valued talent and individuality. The firm has had a corporate commitment to academic rigor, personal reflection, confrontation, and honesty (Gentile & Gant, 1995). In contrast, IBM focused on equity in hiring regardless of race, color, or creed. The company believed that holding managers accountable for diverse results is critical because the organization needed to connect better with customers and become more externally focused. There was also the focus of developing and promoting the best people as the company looked toward a global future (Thomas, 2004). This global outlook is a strategic move for IBM as it expands its markets and responds to the needs of people of color and women around the world.

In terms of the diversity composition, each company's focus was different. At IBM, although the employees were racially and culturally diverse, the team did not reflect the diversity of the market for talent or IBM's customers and employees. A task force was launched in 1995 to rectify the perceived imbalance. Rather than attempting to eliminate discrimination by deliberately ignoring differences among employees; IBM created eight task forces with each focused on a demographically diverse group such as Asians, gays, lesbians, and women.

In contrast, Monitor Company was quite different from IBM. It had a historical legacy embedded in a distinctive academic bent from its founders, Mark and Joe Fuller. The company expected consultants to find their own career path; design their own work pace; and personally address any work issues, internally or externally. Monitor's implementation of its internal systems, such as human resource policies, was consistent with its corporate values. For example, compensation was based entirely on merit. Title and formal hierarchy were avoided, if possible. Although managers strove for diverse opinions and thoughts, employees found the organization increasingly homogeneous. As a result, Monitor's culture created homogeneity of leadership style within the company that excluded cultural diversity.

About 10 years after the start of the company, the consultants at Monitor began to grapple with what diversity meant, both corporately and personally. Nick Basden had uneasy feelings about the organization. Basden explained, "I feel different and I feel different because I'm Black. Something's wrong, I can't put my finger on it, but it's uncomfortable" (Gentile & Gant, 1995, p. 3). He was one of the few persons of color at Monitor but was used to it. Some Caucasians at the company were aware of the lack of diversity. The consultants began to think about what changes in ratio of Caucasians to people of color would bring. For example, would it bring pressures to re-examine the learning and achievement styles that were representative of the culture at Monitor? The consultants had begun to examine their organizational values, probing their understanding of what it means to be diverse (Gentile & Gant).

Shifting Diversity Strategies

The two companies' organizational strategies were different. Monitor Company (Gentile & Gant, 1995) wanted to be a firm where "consultants understood their role to be 'teachers' or 'guides' allowing individuals to find their own career paths, set their own work paces, and confront actively any problems which should arise –including internal ones – and initiate creative responses to them" (p. 1).

What became apparent to IBM's managers was the need to take a more proactive stance on diversity in order to change the course of a company. The fact that IBM has had a long history of progressive management yet lacked a team that reflected societal diversity ratios only goes to

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show the need for diversity initiatives in every organization. Brinckerhoff (1994) asserted that organizations that succeed and thrive are going to be the providers of services in the next century; these companies have a clear focus. Brinckerhoff explained, “They have a vision of what they want for the organization and a road map of how they want to get from here to there” (p. 130). In clearly analyzing their views on diversity and investing in deliberate diversity strategies, both IBM and Monitor Company laid the groundwork for their futures. Furthermore, this groundwork is essential for any company hoping to succeed in the marketplace.

Strategic Implications

The following strategic implications emerged as a resulted of this investigation and are offered to enhance organizational effectiveness and assist both researchers and practitioners:

1. Organizations should engage employees (executives and others) as partners in their plans for diversity initiatives.
2. Organizations should integrate diversity with management practices.
3. Leaders should clearly communicate their support of diversity initiatives every step of the way.
4. Organizations should link diversity goals to broader business goals.
5. Organizations should provide proactive training programs on diversity and encourage career development opportunities for all employees.
6. Organizations should think globally and build diversity into a future success strategy.

In summary, organizations should consider developing a diversity strategy within the overall organizational framework.

The Path Forward

Today, many organizations are still attempting to understand the many cultural and programmatic issues associated with diversity. Some organizations seem content to do nothing, perhaps believing that the diversity issue will go away or resolve itself. However, Monitor Company and IBM displayed a corporate commitment to change. Though they began from different points, they succeeded in bringing increased diversity to their companies as a result of a careful analysis and the meaningful development of strategic initiatives.

Organizations would do well to emulate these diversity initiatives in their strategic planning. The message is that even where goodwill exists, this is not enough to alter a negative trend in the organization. A sincere commitment to change, a well-defined strategy, and strong leadership are the real motors for organizational change. In an increasingly global arena, strategic diversity goals are essential for companies that want to remain competitive. They are also good for business.

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The Tower of Babel and the Rally Driver: Understanding and Negotiating through Resistance to Organizational Change

Guy Cohen

Resistance to change can be the single most difficult hurdle that change management practitioners face when working in organizations. Understanding that resistance, as a facet of human interaction, is far more complex than simply an act of X against Y is key to breaking through lines of understanding that are often obscured with political, social, and personal rhetoric. In the paper that follows, the author (an organizational psychologist) discusses two facets of resistance which he considers as fundamental to our understanding of (a) interpersonal, intrapersonal, and organizational narratives and (b) the cycle of change and resistance to it. The author uses a case study to illustrate these points and concludes with a checklist of practical lessons and further questions when encountering resistance to change in the workplace.

There is an old saying that "the only two things that are certain in life are death and taxes." Indeed, in the business world, organizations rise and fall; grow and shrink; and, with few exceptions, get taxed all along the way. Nevertheless, there is one additional truth that could be said to encompass both of the truths referred to above–change.

Organizational change, or business transformation, is as much a reality of any organization as is its life cycles and the level at which it is taxed. In fact, death and taxes are expressions of change. If we want to be more specific about the certainties of life, we could probably reduce it to one truism: the only constant in life *is* change. Whether this change is gradual or explosive has been the subject of debate amongst anthropologists, psychologists and sociologists alike for quite some time now (NHS Institute for Innovation & Improvement, 2006). However, change is not the focus of this article. Rather, it is *resistance to change* that is the focal point of discussion; because as any organizational change practitioner and organizational employee/employer will know, the greatest single threat to successful change in a business is resistance to it on the part of its stakeholders. It is with this thought in mind that we turn to the title of this article: "The Tower of Babel and the Rally Driver." Why the title? The meaning behind the image will become more apparent as we walk through the terrain that is *resistance*.

Understanding Resistance: The Tower of Babel

The word *resistance* has many applications ranging from the scientific to the political, the psychological to the organizational. What does it mean in the organizational context? When

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faced with change, some will embrace it; others will remain standing and place themselves in a position that does not allow for much movement. Resistance to change, however, is not a one-sided affair. This position is all too common and all too easy to adopt because it assumes that one party in the change negotiation is to blame. On closer inspection, however, one sees that both sides (those embracing the change and those not) are resisting because neither is willing to move from the position they have chosen for themselves. This should come as no surprise to those who have undergone any kind of business transformation. In fact, it is most overtly demonstrated at both an interpersonal and intrapersonal level through statements and thoughts as well as through nonverbal and organizational means. For those embracing change, therefore, resistance is evidenced in statements and thoughts such as: “They just do not understand why this change is important.” and “It is going to happen whether they like it or not.” On the other hand, for those resisting the change, statements and thoughts appear in the form of: “These guys just do not understand what we need” and “They have not thought through the change and its impact on us.” At the organizational level, this may be manifested in the types of communication people receive from the top and the language used therein.

Resistance to change is often viewed as a defense mechanism, in the negative sense of the word. Psychology teaches us, however, that the employment of a defense mechanism is not necessarily negative. This is what makes resistance to change such a complex matter; in some instances, resisting a particular change may be a good thing. The latter would arise either because the organization is not ready for it or because the outcome may neither be beneficial for the individual nor for the group (Folger & Skarlicki, 1999). The decision-making process as to whether or not to embrace a change is thus both a product of the internal conversations we have with ourselves and the external conversations we have with those around us and may be influenced by factors such as culture. As Piderit (2000) pointed out, what some managers may perceive as disrespectful or unfounded resistance to change might be motivated by an individual’s ethical principles or cultural background. This thinking also underscores the importance of the narratives we create both internally and with those around us as well as the narrative created in our relationships with the organizations for which we work.

Narratives contain within them sources of information and knowledge that act as means to exercise power in a manner that includes some but not others (Flecher & Bailyn, 2005). Language (in this case, the language of change and resistance to it) is key to our understanding of resistance because it plays a role in mediating the relationship between knowledge and power. This means that the prevailing social reality is not a given but something that is constructed through the process of representing experience (Fairclough, 1989). When it comes to resistance to change, the language that is used by both people in the change negotiation maintains and sustains the power relationships that depend on it. So, what can we practically take away from all of this when trying to negotiate through resistance to change in an organization?

Human resource, organizational development/change, and/or organizational design practitioners often engage change with the view that it is either necessary or the right thing to do or both. When a client identifies the need for change and a change practitioner confirms this need with surveys and questionnaire results, the question that should be asked is, “What is driving the need for change and what relationships are trying to be built or maintained?” Returning to the image portrayed in the first part of the title of this article (the Tower of Babel), the reader will recall that the tower was created as a means of reaching heaven and serves as an allegory for the creation of different languages on Earth. However, the story also tells us that while the initial intention was to build a means of reaching God, it soon came to represent the

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greed of humanity and concluded with God punishing humans by making them speak in foreign tongues. The net result: communication stopped, work was halted, and the builders scattered to different parts of the world. Given the earlier discussion on language and the power differentials it can create, we can draw several vital lessons for our discussion on resistance to change:

- *Know for whom you are building the tower*: Creating and developing a process or product can be hugely rewarding, but not if there is no value or meaning attached to it. The first lesson to be learned, therefore, is: ***understand the drivers for change and what the change means***. By doing this, you are ensured of neither playing into existing power differentials in the client organization nor of purely pushing through your own intentions. The end result is dealing with concerns that could lead to resistance from the outset.
- *Collaborate, do not just agree*: When organizations are about to undergo or are undergoing change, there is often agreement in some quarters regarding the proposed outcome of the change but not in others. By creating a discursive space; new ways of thinking can surface, and dominant meanings can be resisted (Flecher & Bailyn, 2005). This happens because taken-for-granted assumptions can be relaxed through the envisaging of new organizational realities. The lesson here is: ***find a language that is understood by all***.
- *Organizations have stories too*: All organizations have a history. This history is created not only by its leaders and its people but by prevailing market conditions. As an organizational change practitioner; one of your challenges will be to understand the conditions under which the organization was set up, the conditions under which it is currently operating, and to what degree the original culture is still pervasive. Understanding and applying this information means you have a better sense of where the resistance is coming from, as well as what it represents for those who are resisting the change. The lesson here is: ***knowing your past means knowing your present***.

Resistance and the Cycle of Change: The Rally Driver

In the last 10-15 years, there has been a move to think of change and resistance to it in terms of transitions and transitional phenomena (Bolognese, 2002). Thus, the process of change has been seen as the process of moving from one way of doing things to another. For Bridges (1991), it is not the actual change that individuals resist but rather the transition that must be made to accommodate the change. He stated,

> Change is not the same as transition. Change is situational: the new site, the new boss, the new team roles, the new policy. Transition is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation. Change is external, transition is internal. Unless transition occurs, change will not work. (pp. 3-4)

Similarly, Coetsee (1999) explained resistance to change by looking at it through the lens of a continuum model. For Coetsee, rather than viewing acceptance of change (commitment) and rejection of change (resistance) as separate phenomena, we should be viewing them as being closely linked. They represent a polarity, with each being the far end of the continuum. Moving from resistance to commitment, therefore, is done through sequential phases contained within the continuum.

The image of a rally driver is apt when considering resistance to change in terms of transitional phenomena. Rally drivers, after all, have to make several transitions be it in speed or the stages of a race. They need to constantly negotiate changing terrain and come out of it in the

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smoothest manner possible. While not a rally driver, the author has used the metaphor because there are two basic things about rally driving that apply directly to the topic under discussion: (a) different points of the racecourse require different approaches on the part of the driver, and (b) the driver is at a loss without his or her navigator. The myriad of theories on the subject of resistance to change, however, make it somewhat more difficult to know (a) where on the course you are and (b) how to navigate your way through the next point of the cycle with the help of a range of people all of whom may have differing opinions about what to do next. Add to this the complexities of language and the power it affords some and not others, and one can begin to appreciate the scale of the issue change practitioners face almost daily in their work. This then begs a very simple question: “What approach is one to take?” If the answer were simple, resistance to organizational change would never have been researched to the degree that it has been. However, here are a couple of lessons learned from the field of consulting:

- *Chart your course:* Elite rally drivers and their navigators try and get as familiar with the terrain and the course they are planning to navigate *before* they race. The same rule applies to organizational change practitioners. The lesson learned here is: ***know the lay of the land.***
- *Choose your approach, but learn when to be flexible*: If you have ever watched a motor sport race, you will know that the approach the drivers take when going into a corner rests on achieving pinpoint precision and getting out of the corner in the least time consuming way. If you are not a keen motor sport fan, then think about what one does when changing lanes or turning a corner: choose an approach and then stick with it. However, the driver leaves room to make a change if needed, because one can never really predict what is going to happen on the road. The same can be said of negotiating through resistance to change. The lesson to be learned here is: ***know when you need to change your approach to change.***
- *Pushing the brakes does not equate to coming to a standstill:* All too often, change engagements are put under undue (and often unrealistic) time pressures to deliver a change. This means that in environments in which there is already a cautious stance towards the change or where people are not ready for change, there will be greater resistance to it. This is particularly true in cases where an organization tries to rush through a change in the hope that goals can be achieved quickly and painlessly. The reality, however, is that stress levels increase and job satisfaction levels decline because they are being asked to leave the familiar behind (de Jager, 2001). In the world of rally driving, no accomplished driver ever did himself or herself any favor by not applying the brakes at the right moment. The same lesson can be applied to organizational change practitioners: ***slowing down is not the same as stopping altogether***.

Having gone through the lessons learned, we are now in a position to see how they apply to a case study. To facilitate this process, a summary table has been added for easy reference (see Table 1).

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Table 1

Top Tips for Those Facing Resistance to Organizational Change

Lesson	Questions to consider
1. Understand the drivers for change and what the change means	• Who is this change really for? • What are the desired goals of the change? • What does the change mean to people in the organization, and how do they view it?
2. Find a language that is understood by all	• Do you understand what is being asked of you? • Does the client understand what you are asking of them? • In what terms is the need for change expressed? • Is the change request politically loaded?
3. Knowing your past means knowing your present	• What is the historical attitude of the organization to change? • What is the prevailing culture in the organization? Does it favor change? • What has worked in the distant past? What has worked more recently?
4. Know the lay of the land	• Who are the key stakeholders in the organization? • Can you comfortably describe the organization’s culture? • Can you identify the barriers and facilitators of change? • Can you identify potential barriers and facilitators to change and respond ahead of time?
5. Know when you need to change your approach to change.	• Is your approach to change achieving intended results? • If not, what needs to be adjusted? • Is it time to consider the options open to you? • Are you reaching people at all levels of the organization?
6. Slowing down is not the same as stopping altogether	• What is the pace of change usually like in the organization? • What is the pace at which you are trying to implement change in the organization? • Are you making time to take stock of what is going on?

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Making Sense of It All: A Case In Point

The paper has so far discussed some of the theoretical tenets of organizational change and resistance to it. The discussion has presented practitioners with some of the key challenges they will face when encountering resistance to change in their work and has made some suggestions about how to deal effectively with them. Before concluding, it would be useful to look at a brief case study in which resistance to change was present and how it was addressed.

The author was asked to assist in a behavioral analysis of several deployment teams and a management team working in a large public sector organization. Both the deployment teams and the management teams were made up of civil servants and consultants. At the time of the first meeting, the teams had gone through their first deployment (IT) cycle together with stress levels reaching reported disproportionate levels; some of the team members had even threatened to leave the project. At the time of the initial meeting, the relationship between deployment team members and the management team were fractious. Changes in seating plans, the physical separation of management from deployment teams (before, they sat closer together or in the same work space), and political maneuvering within the management team meant that (a) messages were often miscommunicated and (b) the deployment teams felt that there was a distinct lack of structure and direction in the project. To add to the internal difficulties, budgetary restraints meant that the engagement was not to last longer than 12 working days; only 12 working days in which to gain people's trust, conduct an analysis, run workshops with deployment and management teams, make recommendations as to how the recommendations should be driven forward, and roll off the engagement feeling that everything that could be done was done in the allotted time.

In many situations, the above scenario could quite appropriately be described as a train wreck. Engagements of this kind rarely give the practitioner time to do anything meaningful if change is to be positively affected, if at all. In fact, in many cases, practitioners would be encouraged to proceed with caution; when you enter a mine field, things tend to get pretty messy. Furthermore, engagements that have a particularly political feel to them often result in different players having different levels of access to information meaning that messages get crossed, people begin to doubt the efficacy of the process (if they did not already), and resistance to change is increased. Nevertheless, the engagement was accepted and began with some detailed discussions about the nature of the change, resistance to it, and what the project managers hoped to get out of the 12-day engagement. As stated earlier, discussions of this nature are very important and highly useful in order to cover your tracks and give you room to decline an engagement if you think that it would do more damage than good. They are also vital if you are to understand the meanings that people import into the change process and what the source of their resistance might be.

Following the initial in-depth discussion, 1-1 semistructured focus interviews were held with each member of the deployment and management teams. The results covered both predeployment and postdeployment issues as well as relations between civil servants and consultants at all levels in the teams. While everyone was happy to speak openly about the issues they faced, most of the civil servant staff were highly skeptical as to whether anything meaningful would be done with the information. For the most part, their experience with the consultants was not a positive one; and they questioned my ability to remain objective, considering the author was employed by the consulting firm. Gaining their trust was the first hurdle that had to be overcome for the engagement to succeed.

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In order to achieve trust, several additional conversations with civil servant and consultancy staff were held with the aim of achieving some quick wins/actions that could be put into place with reasonable haste. At the top of the agenda was coaching some of the more junior consultants who were highly ambitious and driven to learn from, listen to, and show respect for the civil servants that were several years their senior both in age and experience. Secondly, every effort was made to sit among the deployment team members so that they would get to know the author and so that he could understand the culture of the organization better through continued conversations with staff. Time was also spent with members of the management team, some of whom had once been deployment team members. Thirdly, an initial line of communication was established between some of the management team members and the deployment team members as well as between the deployment team members themselves. This was crucial as communication was one of the biggest barriers to successful working relations on the project.

Once the initial quick-win steps were put into action, the next step involved presenting the results of the focus interviews to both the deployment and management teams. It was decided that owing to the already difficult nature of the relationship between the teams, two sessions should be held (one with the deployment and one with the management teams) so people could be given free rein to add anything in a safe environment. This was then fed back to each of the teams, and recommendations were made to the management team. Of interest to the author was that some of the management team members (and one in particular) distanced themselves from the first meeting and avoided the focus interview altogether despite various attempts. However, when they started to realize that something was going to be done with the information, they attended subsequent workshops and shared their views about what they felt the next steps should be. This was particularly significant because some of the individuals had expressed their discomfort with “soft issues” to several members of the management team. During these sessions, it was also suggested that someone in the senior team should be responsible for driving the recommendations forward and being the go-between for the management and deployment teams. Although one of the more senior members was a natural choice; their stress levels were particularly high, and there was some concern about their lack of visibility across the deployment teams (over and above their stress-related behavior). It was thus decided to choose a slightly more junior member in the interim, one who had previously been a deployment team member. At last check (1 month ago), the author was informed that the more senior individual had taken over the role as the go-between and was having regular update meetings with the teams and giving them a greater sense of direction regarding where the project was heading.

Conclusion

Looking back, it is clear that there were a multitude of layers of resistance to the presence of the author on the ground in the aforementioned engagement. Some of these are difficult to express in words because they often took the form of nonverbal expressions. Thus, resistance was present when people regularly did not attend meetings, cancelled several meetings at the last minute and did not respond to follow-up e-mails, openly expressed disinterest in the process, said all the right words but did not back them up with actions, or said one thing and did the exact opposite. Such behaviors are commonplace in organizations on a day-to-day basis, particularly in change management engagements, and can derail processes regardless of the best intentions in the world.

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Keeping tabs on what is coming up (as a rally driver would do) and navigating your way through these pitfalls and choosing when it is/is not appropriate to engage the client on these issues are keys to a successful engagement. Establishing trust as soon as possible, as the example illustrated, is key; without trust, little can be achieved. Change management, after all, is principally about people. Ultimately, resistance to change is not merely a case of X against Y; rather, it is a complex web weaved by language and the interpretation thereof, a web that can become uncomfortably sticky when all voices are not heard and when the prevailing ideologies are those of a few people holding positions of power. By acknowledging people's individual experiences of change and by understanding the drivers and the meaning behind their resistance to change, one can help to create an environment in which negotiation is possible and alternate organizational realities can be explored.

About the Author

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