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## From Brainwashing to Organization Therapy

### *The Evolution of a Model of Change Dynamics*

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In this chapter I describe and analyze the evolution of concepts of change based on my own experience as a researcher and consultant. I put this into a historical context, drawing on the research findings from social psychology, sociology, and anthropology that influenced my thinking. This is not intended to be a history of the change field but rather an analysis of how my own thinking evolved around the critical research findings I encountered in the late 1940s and early 1950s and my experiences as a consultant from the 1950s to the present.

I have come to realize that concepts have roots, in both our personal and our academic histories. Inasmuch as I have been instrumental in introducing into the organization development (OD) field the concepts of organizational psychology, as differentiated from industrial psychology (Schein, 1965, 1970, 1980), coercive

persuasion (Schein, 1956, 1961a), career anchors (Schein, 1977, 1978, 1985a, 2006), process consultation (Schein, 1969, 1987, 1988, 1999b), and organizational culture (Schein, 1984, 1985b, 1999a, 2004), the questions arise in my own mind of how I came upon these concepts and what common theme runs through my 50 years of thinking about these things.

The common theme, of course, is personal change, especially change induced by others. In thinking about change in various different settings and contexts, some of them in the extreme contexts of prisoner of war (POW) camps or political prisons, I evolved a model of the essential components of change based on Kurt Lewin's seminal model (Lewin, 1947; Schein, 1961a). But I have come to realize through seeing how others interpret my change

model that abstractions are easy to misinterpret and that the model has elements that are not yet understood well enough without examining particular change programs in some detail. The context in which this becomes crucial is in our work as OD consultants when we engage in what is essentially organization therapy.

### ACADEMIC ROOTS (1948–1952)

My own academic career started with experimental research on social influence and imitation, focusing on the question of whether one of the mechanisms by which people changed their own behavior was to mimic or be influenced by the behavior of another. We take this change mechanism for granted when we advocate role modeling but have not really examined exactly what takes place when one person replaces his or her own response with something that he or she sees another person doing. Psychiatric theory would draw on the defense mechanism of identification for a deeper analysis of this phenomenon, but that implicates another often overlooked element of change: What is actually being changed, and does the change entail replacing an element that is already there? Is it new behavior, new attitudes, new values, new perceptions, or new thought processes that we are analyzing? Can we assume that the change mechanisms are the same for each of these response categories, and if something present needs to be replaced, is the mechanism of unlearning the same for each response category?

My experiments in imitation focused on whether imitation on cognitive judgments would generalize to other kinds of judgments. In pursuing my master's degree in social psychology at Stanford, I had worked with professor Harry Helson on how judgment was ultimately determined by adaptation level, the neutral point in our subjective scales of judgment (Helson, 1948). For example, in working with weights, at what weight would I shift my judgment from "light" to "heavy"? We had

students in groups judge weights and asked one or more to make extreme judgments to see whether the adaptation level of others who heard these judgments could be influenced. They were, confirming what Sherif (1936) had already shown with the research on autokinetic phenomena, that when an ambiguous stimulus is presented to several people, a group norm develops around their joint adaptation level.

In my PhD work I pursued this line of research. I put groups of five people into a situation in which each person was to make perceptual judgments of how many dots appeared briefly on a screen, something that was very ambiguous but for which there was a correct answer. Respondents were to give their responses in order and could hear each other. At the end of each trial I announced the correct answer. I manipulated the situation so that the task was sufficiently ambiguous to allow me to choose as "correct" a preponderance of the answers of the second person in the sequence, to see whether the third, fourth, and fifth person would begin to repeat whatever the second person had said. Over a number of trials there was a clear trend toward imitation. The crucial question was whether such imitation would continue if the task were switched to something different. On a similar cognitive judgment task, imitation continued, but on a dissimilar task involving aesthetic judgments imitation declined sharply (Schein, 1954).

These experiments were done at a time (1940–1952) when social influence was very central in social psychology, based on the classic experiments by Sherif and the subsequent research by Asch that showed that even in the face of clear empirical evidence, many people could be swayed to deny what they saw if others reported something different (Asch, 1952; Sherif, 1936; Sherif & Sherif, 1969). In other words, we are more dependent on the judgments of others than we might at first realize, even in unambiguous situations. Although this clearly established the importance of social

influence, there were individual differences in the degree to which people were influenced, which led psychologists to become more preoccupied with determining the individual variables that would account for these differences rather than pursuing the social side of it, which was being explored thoroughly by the Chicago school of sociology under Everett Hughes, Erving Goffman, and many others (Goffman, 1959; Hughes, 1958). The psychologists had discovered how group norms form through mutual influence in reducing uncertainty but did not really consider the subsequent impact of such norms on individual behavior. The sociologists had discovered that once norms exist in a group, they are quite coercive. In the industrial sector the classic Hawthorne studies were showing clearly how powerful group norms can both stimulate and inhibit production levels (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). In summary, group pressure is one of the components of how change occurs.

In the post-World War II effort to understand the nature of Nazism and its ability to get ordinary people to do extraordinarily brutal things, social psychologists also examined the nature of authority and leadership, culminating in the drastic experiments of Philip Zimbardo (Zimbardo & Ebbesen, 1969) and Stanley Milgram (1983). Zimbardo showed how ordinary college students could begin to behave in cruel ways within a matter of days if given the role of prison guard in a simulation of prisons on campus. Milgram showed that students could be made to give what they believed to be severe electric shocks to fellow students who were giving wrong answers in a learning test just by being ordered to do so by the experimenter. In this same era, the early work of Kurt Lewin on different leadership styles was receiving increasing attention because of two major findings (Marrow, Bowers, & Seashore, 1967). Groups that worked under an autocratic leader could be just as productive as groups that worked under a more participative "democratic" leader, but if the leader departed, the participative

groups continued to function well and remain productive, whereas the autocratically managed groups deteriorated and became less productive. If change was to be self-sustaining, participation and democratic leadership appeared to be necessary. When these findings were coupled with the findings of experiments on changing the work habits of production workers, it became clear that behavior change was more likely to occur if the workers were involved in designing the change. In fact, if workers were not involved, they resisted change. Resistance to change became a popular concept as something to be taken for granted, but how to overcome it remained controversial and ambiguous despite the findings that group forces, authority, and participation were clearly proven to be beneficial in inducing change.

These findings were problematic because they did not reveal the relative importance of these different factors. On one hand, there was plenty of evidence that people respond to peer group and authority pressures ("just show them examples, tell them what to do"). On the other hand, there were plenty of findings that argued that people will not change unless they are personally involved in the change process. Clearly, change was a more complex process than what either set of these classic experiments revealed. This complexity was revealed to me in depth through my fortuitous involvement in the study of repatriated prisoners of war and civilians who had been subjected to "brainwashing."

#### **BRAINWASHING OR COERCIVE PERSUASION (1952-1961)**

After earning my PhD under the aegis of the Army Clinical Psychology Program, I was fortunate enough to be assigned to the social psychology and psychiatry section of the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, run by Dr. David Rioch. Rioch was a brilliant psychiatrist who believed in truly interdisciplinary work. At one extreme the lab had endocrinologists, ecologists, statisticians, and behavioral

psychologists, and at the other extreme were psychiatrists who had worked at the front lines in World War II, social psychologists, and anthropologists. We were trying to figure out everything from how people got ulcers to how breakdowns occurred in combat stress. Psychologists such as Leon Festinger and sociologists such as Erving Goffman were invited regularly as consultants to help all of us broaden our perspectives.

My own interest at that time was the organizational network research that had been launched by Alex Bavelas at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the late 1940s and pursued by Harold Leavitt (1951). This research was a departure from the work on imitation and influence in that it focused more on leadership and organization dynamics. At this time we were involved in the Korean conflict and had lost several thousand men to the North Korean and Chinese POW camps. The Chinese communists were in a frenzy to show everyone how valid their version of communism was, so they were bent on indoctrinating as many military and civilian captives as they could. In the exchange of sick and wounded prisoners in 1953 it was revealed that some prisoners had signed false confessions and in other ways collaborated with the enemy. Edward Hunter wrote a book called *Brainwashing in Red China* (Hunter, 1958) and introduced into English a word that has now become common usage. It was based on the Chinese concept of cleansing the mind of middle-class values.

When the armistice was signed and the United States was scheduled to receive more than 3,000 repatriates, the question arose of whether and how these POWs might have been indoctrinated and what help they might need to reintegrate into the U.S. ideology. The three services pulled together all the psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers in the service, made them into teams, and placed them aboard ships that would carry several hundred repatriates from Inchon, Korea, to

San Francisco. The 16-day voyage would provide time to give tests and do what therapy might be appropriate. But no one really knew what we were facing.

It turned out that my ship was delayed, so I found myself in Inchon, Korea, for 3 weeks with nothing to do but wait. Because something had happened in the POW camps that had to do with drastic influence and shocking changes of political or personal values, I set up shop to interview people as they were coming through to find out what had happened since they were captured. The intellectual problem was to find out what would lead a captive to sign a false confession, march in a "peace march" for obvious propaganda reasons, and even make false allegations against a fellow POW. The social psychology of the day (mid-1950s) was preoccupied with models of attitude change based on experiments with changing different appeals. None of this literature could explain the more dramatic behavior changes of POWs and subsequently the even more dramatic changes undergone by civilian captives on the Chinese mainland. Many of them came out of China stating that they had been spies and had been leniently treated considering their crimes in being released after 3 to 5 years. These were students, businessmen, and priests, so we found their admissions incredible and took comfort in the vague explanation of "brainwashing."

What the interviews of repatriates and Chinese civilians revealed is that the Chinese communists were sincere in their beliefs in their own version of reality and that they were willing to manipulate the social and psychological setting of prisoners to get their message across. Manipulating mail, removing leaders from groups, constantly repeating the new message, and other techniques that prisoners were unable to avoid led to what Lewin had earlier called "unfreezing" or destabilizing the quasistationary equilibria that we count on to make sense of our world. This led to an important insight about managed change: the concept of coercive persuasion (Schein, 1961a).

If you can coerce the person to stay in the setting, you can eventually get him or her to open him- or herself to considering alternative points of view toward an issue. In other words, if you can hold a person captive, you can sooner or later motivate him or her to change.

Coercing people into behavioral change such as signing false confessions or marching in peace marches is not a change comparable to civilians coming to believe that they were spies and were leniently treated. In these mainland prisons, if they offered to sign false confessions, the interrogators became furious and argued that they wanted “sincere” understanding and adoption of the communist point of view. Prisoners were told that they were guilty because they had been arrested, and no amount of protesting of innocence would shake the captor’s conviction of their guilt. So the paradox of this kind of change is that the prisoner becomes motivated to change through the constant battering but does not really know what the captor expects because of his or her own cognitive structure, which differs from that of the captor.

The Chinese communists understood this dilemma and put captives into group cells in which some cellmates were farther along in their change process and therefore could help the new cellmate to understand what was wanted. This process is best conceptualized as cognitive redefinition and involves changing the semantic meaning of concepts and changing the adaptation level, or standards by which things are judged. The key was for prisoners to come to understand that the Western concept of “crime” as demonstrated harm to some victim and the principle that you are innocent until proven guilty were not shared by the communist ideology. From the Chinese point of view, a crime was any behavior that could be harmful to the state, which involved totally different tacit assumptions about the role of the state as a potential victim. The prisoners learned that sending postcards home describing

local wheat fields could under some future war scenario be useful information to an enemy and therefore was “espionage.” Jesuit priests who had run missions learned that they had violated their own Christian values and communist egalitarian principles by employing houseboys in inferior servant roles, which was defined as “imperialist exploitation.”

On the matter of standards of judgment, prisoners learned that what they might regard as trivial was considered very serious from the point of view of an aspiring political movement that was still very young and very insecure. When prisoners demonstrated some understanding of these different standards of judgment, they received immediate positive reinforcement from cellmates and interrogators. With the appropriate degree of admitting guilt and with active self-criticism, prisoners were treated better. The interrogators became more encouraging that the changes were now sincere, and prisoners were relieved to learn that their 3 to 5 years in prison might be enough of a prison sentence. If they were released despite their serious crimes of espionage and exploitation, they felt they had been treated leniently. So the next big insight about change can be stated as follows:

Change in beliefs or attitudes involves cognitively redefining certain concepts and changing one’s standards of judgment through shifts in the semantics of what things mean and changes in the adaptation level.

Coerced behavioral change alone may or may not lead to such cognitive change, depending on the degree of coercion and the possibilities of getting insight into what is really wanted. Thus, for example, the coerced political behavior in the Soviet Union did not change certain attitudes toward political freedom but did change some attitudes toward the role of the state in providing full employment and other social services. Dissonance theory argues that eventually we adopt concepts and attitudes that

justify our behavior, but what the prison experience illustrated is that developing new concepts and changed standards may require help from others. We cannot automatically think up new concepts or standards of judgment, but once we are motivated (unfrozen), we seek justifications and rationalizations for what we are coerced into doing by looking to others and identifying with them. This often gives the indoctrinators the illusion that they are powerful conveyors of the message. The truth may be that the coerced victim is eager to latch onto whatever makes sense of his or her present situation. This analysis leads to a third critical insight:

People will resist cognitive redefinition and changes in their standards of judgment unless they have been unfrozen or find themselves coerced into remaining in a situation that requires new concepts and standards.

This principle requires us to unpack Lewin's concept of unfreezing. Other than the kind of severe coercion that we saw in the prisoner situation, what would motivate a person to consider learning some new way of looking at things? My formulation is that several things have to occur for such motivation to arise, and two kinds of anxiety have to be managed:

- *Disconfirmation*: Something must be felt to be going wrong that produces survival anxiety, or there must be a feeling of not achieving something that is expected or hoped for, which produces some form of disappointment or guilt.

- *Learning anxiety*: However, the prospect of learning something new produces learning anxiety because the new behavior, attitude, or value may be too hard to learn, may undermine present sense of identity, or may cause one to lose membership in a valued group. Learning anxiety is the basis for resistance to change, usually in the form of denial of the disconfirming data.

- *Psychological safety*: The resistance to change can be overcome only if the change target feels that learning is possible, that the new can be integrated into the current identity, and that group membership will not be lost or will be suitably replaced.

These forces in combination create the motivation to change that then leads the person to seek new sources of information or new role models with which to identify. Cognitive redefinition and adaptation level change then become possible.

In the case of prisoners, the disconfirmation and experienced anxiety were obvious. But the motivation to change did not really arise until the cellmates were provided a more psychologically safe environment that allowed the prisoner to sincerely ask, "What do they want from me? I just don't understand; I am innocent." Only when the prisoner genuinely inquired in this way could he or she learn what the communist concepts of crime and espionage were.

This same multistep process has to be present in *all* cases of change. For example, I am working with a power company that was under criminal indictment for failing to report some environmentally dangerous materials. The court mandated that they would create a program of environmental responsibility and put a monitor into the organization to report quarterly on their progress. This was severe disconfirmation. The inability to manage their own affairs without the interference of the court created great survival anxiety, which motivated a host of programs to change the culture. Management used incentives and harsh discipline to impose new behavioral rules for identifying, reporting, and remediating oil spills and asbestos, polychlorinated biphenyl, and mercury dangers, a learning process that produced a great deal of learning anxiety and resistance to change. Not only did immediate behavior have to change, but the organization knew that the real change had to be defined as getting internalization of these norms to the



point that the court would trust them enough to lift the probation (Schein, 1999a).

From my point of view as a consultant, this change required a cognitive shift in the self-image of the employee from someone who kept the power on reliably to someone who took environmental responsibility as well as keeping the power on. For this shift to occur, the employee had to have extensive training in diagnosing environmental hazards and figuring out what to do about them (cognitive redefinition through new semantic meaning of what it meant to be an employee). In addition, the employee had to accept new standards of judgment (i.e., that even a few drops of oil had to be reported and dealt with and that this was as important as keeping the power on). This was not an easy shift. Some employees resisted the change because they felt insecure in dealing with environmental matters. It was the extensive training that created enough psychological safety to get those employees on board. Employees were formed into labor-management groups that were encouraged to invent ways of dealing with environmental spills and other hazards. For them, psychological safety came through participation in fixing the problems. Some employees left rather than accepting this new concept of their work. Some 7 years later, employees accept their new role, believe that environmental responsibility is important, and deal responsibly with environmental hazards. No doubt some of the old timers would regard these employees as having been "brainwashed."

To conclude this section, I am arguing that most organization change involves changes in attitudes and beliefs, although it usually begins with coerced behavior change. If that is a correct view, then the change agent must understand clearly how unfreezing and eventually cognitive redefinition works. Most theories of change talk about the tactics of creating change without any real understanding of unfreezing as a sociopsychological process or cognitive redefinition as the ultimate change goal to be achieved.

## LEARNING THE TECHNOLOGY OF CHANGE (1957 TO THE PRESENT)

A decade of work with the National Training Labs (1957–1967) exposed me to a whole other way of looking at change management. Kurt Lewin's legacy gave us useful experimental data and theories, and his point of view spawned some crucial change tools, the most powerful of which was force-field analysis.

*Force-Field Analysis to Diagnose the State of Unfreezing.* By specifying the direction of desired change and then analyzing what forces are already pushing in that direction and what forces inhibit movement in that direction, the change agent can decide whether the change target is really motivated to change. The adding of driving forces can then be thought of as disconfirmation or increasing survival anxiety, and the removal of inhibiting forces can be thought of as creating psychological safety by reducing learning anxiety. What such analysis typically reveals is that the change target's psychological field usually is quite complex, and there are many forces on both sides, which create the so-called quasistationary equilibrium.

In deciding to do a force-field analysis, the change agent is also encouraged to think very carefully about the level of change desired. Are we trying initially just to produce behavior change, and what forces are operating to inhibit that? Can we coerce the target to remain in the field if the disconfirming forces get to be too uncomfortable? Are we assuming that behavior change will by itself automatically lead to attitude and belief change, or do we need a separate analysis of the present cognitive field and what it would take to get cognitive redefinition? That probably would entail a separate force-field analysis.

*Role-Set Analysis and the Power of Reference Groups.* The most common inhibitor of change is the target's unwillingness to break the norms of the group that he or she identifies with or

uses as a reference group for his or her own behavior (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Sherif & Sherif, 1969). Our core identities are very much a product of past and present group memberships. Our cognitive structures, our beliefs and attitudes are the result of those memberships, and they are maintained by our desire to continue to get confirmation from our present reference groups that we are okay, that we are not violating some norms or standards that the group holds. The civilian prisoners in Chinese communist camps did not change their understanding of crime, espionage, and lenient treatment until they began to identify with their cellmates. The cellmates became the key reference group and the source of cognitive redefinition. When these prisoners were repatriated, most of them underwent a second change back toward U.S. concepts of crime and espionage, except in the case of one couple who maintained their pro-communist views because they reinforced them in each other. Keeping true to each other became more important than fitting in with Western society and concepts.

For this reason, an important diagnostic for change agents is to figure out what the role-set of the change target is. Who are his or her key reference groups and stakeholders? Who would be upset if the change target exhibited new behavior, beliefs, or attitudes? By analyzing the role-set, the change agent locates what may be some of the most important restraining forces. This process enables the change agent to develop a more refined strategy for how to create psychological safety for the target. It also reveals role dynamics that enable the change agent to compensate for what the change target may feel as *role ambiguity* (not really knowing what is expected with regard to some role senders), *role overload* (realizing that the sum total of what is expected of any one person far exceeds what they are able to respond to, allowing the change agent to recognize the need to get the change agenda high in the change target's "inbox"), and *role conflict* (realizing that

the change target may be experiencing that two critical role senders [e.g., management on one hand, peers and subordinates on the other] have conflicting expectations). Probably the most common version of such conflict occurs when the expectations of the role sender are in conflict with the target person's own expectations of himself or herself.

In my own experience, one's own self-concept and sense of ethics—what we want to call integrity—rests heavily on our integration into membership and reference groups. What this means is that the strongest source of resistance to cognitive redefinition will inevitably come from those group affiliations. It is for this reason that one can state the following principle:

Change in attitudes and beliefs can occur only if the individual is physically and psychologically separated from his or her membership and reference groups or if the change program is targeted at the group itself.

The reason team learning, family group change programs, and total system change programs are so necessary is because in the end these are the only kinds of programs that can overcome valid resistance to change and lead to genuine cognitive redefinition. However, the focus on groups, team building, family group change programs, and total system change programs overlooks the fact that individuals differ in how vulnerable they are to group forces.

#### CAREER ANCHORS (1961–1973 AND ONTO THE PRESENT)

When my research on coercive persuasion was coming to an end, the question arose as to what this had to do with management and business organizations. As it happened, the late 1950s were filled with books about corporate indoctrination. The G.E. center at Crotonville was called the G.E. Indoctrination Center, and IBM had a management development system



that taught the “correct” IBM response to various kinds of business situations. It seemed logical to me to study corporate indoctrination by tracking Sloan School MBA alumni into their careers and track their changes in beliefs and attitudes as they joined organizations. I had previously developed attitude questionnaires that compared faculty, Sloan fellows, senior executives, and incoming students and found that student attitudes overall showed a drift away from faculty attitudes toward business attitudes (Schein, 1967). It seemed logical to study this process more intensely in a panel of alumni to see how it worked in detail.

Three panels of 15 students were interviewed and surveyed in 1961, 1962, and 1963 with the intention of comparing their responses 1 year out with the responses of their supervisors and peer groups in their companies. Unfortunately, no clear patterns emerged in any of the three years, but it became apparent that a great deal of job and company shifting was taking place not only in the first year but thereafter. Another survey 5 years out again showed no consistent patterns, so I abandoned the project until 1973, when I asked all panel members to return to MIT for a debriefing and found career anchors (Schein, 1977, 1978, 1985a, 1990). Almost all alumni, now 10–12 years into their careers, talked about finding what they were really good at, what they valued, and what kind of career motivated them. These elements were forged through successive experiences into a self-image that began to constrain career choices, set career directions, and specify what kind of organization or work setting was preferred. Once such a self-image began to jell, it operated like an anchor, keeping each alumnus in his or her safe harbor.

The reason I had not found patterns of attitude change overall is because the first 10 years of the career involved a lot of searching, which the U.S. open labor market made possible. This search revealed that the group that had originally all said they wanted to be CEOs and

“captains of industry” really evolved into eight different patterns or career anchors. One group wanted independence and autonomy, which led them into teaching, consulting, or other free-form occupations; one group wanted security and stability, which led them into large, “safe” organizations with good benefit programs; one group wanted technical or functional competence, which led them to search for jobs where they could grow and develop the particular skills that defined their identity, whether that was sales, engineering, software design, or whatever; one group wanted to climb the corporate ladder and was busy working their way up in various organizations; one group wanted to be entrepreneurs, to found and build enterprises that were entirely their own; one group wanted an occupation in which they felt they were improving something, working out some important personal values by providing a service; one group wanted pure challenge in the sense that the only kind of work that appealed to them was work that solved impossible problems or was intensely competitive; and one group became more concerned about lifestyle, or how to integrate their own career concerns with the needs of a fully career committed spouse and how to find a setting in which family and personal needs could both be met.

Once formed, career anchors remained quite stable and determined most of the career choices that continued to be made. The practical implication of this concept was the importance of knowing one’s career anchor so that choices would be made that would not be regretted later. For me the important insight was that in an open society such as the United States there is a perpetual tension between the needs and requirements of the organization and the needs and requirements of the individual. One of the best ways for a person to resist change is to move out of the situation in which change is required. One of the best ways for an organization to force change is to prevent the person from leaving, whether by physical coercion or “golden handcuffs.”

### PROCESS CONSULTATION AND ORGANIZATION THERAPY (1960S TO THE PRESENT)

From the point of view of the researcher, the work on coercive persuasion was an adequate model to understand how an organization or a captor could design a set of circumstances that would produce behavior and ultimately attitude change. However, this model did not sufficiently explain how a change agent, whether in the role of consultant, teacher, or therapist, can create conditions for change if the power to coerce is not available. My own understanding of the consulting and therapeutic role came primarily from work with the National Training Labs running T (training) groups. The participants who signed up to learn more about leadership, groups, and their own impact on others were partially unfrozen by virtue of their decision to attend the labs. Feedback from others in the form of how their behavior came across had the further potential of disconfirming what a person believed about himself or herself. The staff member (trainer) was responsible for creating a milieu in the group that would make it safe to reveal anxiety- or guilt-producing data and to ensure that such data would lead to learning rather than psychological damage.

The critical insight in becoming an effective trainer was the realization that telling the group members what to do, taking an active trainer role, would not work. Group members would not feel safe enough to reveal what was really bothering them. Therefore, any advice or direction was likely to be off target in terms of what group members needed. Instead the trainer had to help the group create psychological safety for itself by gradually building up enough mutual acquaintance and trust to be able to tolerate what could be quite threatening feedback.

The essence of this process was the management of the two kinds of anxiety previously identified: *survival anxiety* (if I accept these disconfirming data about myself or my situation,

I may lose power, identity, or group membership, so I have to change or learn) and *learning anxiety* (learning something new may not be possible for me, I may not have the skill or motivation, or learning something new may make me lose power, identity, or group membership). As previously noted, it is the learning anxiety that produces resistance to change, most often in the form of denying the data that would produce survival anxiety. We rationalize the disconfirming data away until the learning anxiety is reduced enough to enable us to learn something new. The management of these two kinds of anxieties is the essence of good consultation and therapy, and the operating principle that worked for me can be stated as follows:

The key to producing change is to reduce the learning anxiety, to create the conditions where the change target can accept the need to learn because he or she can see a safe direction in which to move without feeling a loss of power, identity, or group membership.

As I was learning how to be a trainer, I was also learning how to be a consultant in organization settings, and I discovered in those settings that advice or direction tended to be ignored or subverted even if it was based on my good intentions and my sincere belief that I knew enough about the situation the client was in. The problem was that either my advice did not take into account the culture of the organization and hence was irrelevant or, more often, it was premature in the sense that the client had not yet really revealed what was bothering him or her because I had not built a relationship of trust that enabled the client to feel psychologically safe in being more open. What I learned both in the T groups and in consulting was that I had to manage the initial process of building a relationship and that the best way to do that was to focus on the interpersonal dynamics of communication processes (Schein, 1969, 1987, 1988, 1999b). Making clients aware of these processes then turned

out to be productive for building a trusting relationship and for starting the client on an important learning process of his or her own. Whatever organization problems were ultimately worked on, communication and conversation were always at the root of everything, and the sooner clients learned about the subtleties of listening and conversing, the better off they were.

Once a relationship with the client had been built, it was more likely that clients would reveal what was really bothering them, what kind of disconfirmation they were experiencing, so that the consultant and client could then decide together what the next intervention should be. By deciding together they avoided the trap of designing next steps that would be culturally incongruent, or if some aspects of the culture itself were the problem they could design a culture change program. These thoughts can be summarized in the following generalization:

The primary role of a therapist, consultant, or teacher is to create an environment in which a relationship with the client can be built that will make the client feel safe enough to deal with prior disconfirmations and the further disconfirmations that may occur in the learning situation itself.

Some words have to be said about prior disconfirmations. All of us have had some kind of negative feedback or failure experiences in our lives. These are repressed, suppressed, and denied until we feel psychologically safe enough to admit what happened or what we heard. A parent has told us that we are very selfish, and we have steadfastly denied that to ourselves until a situation in therapy or in a normal life situation or a T group makes us feel safe enough to admit it and begin to work on it. All of us in adulthood have a storehouse full of those kinds of prior disconfirmations ready to enter consciousness and be dealt with once we feel safe enough to deal with them. Therefore, it is no surprise when someone

“suddenly” begins a change process without appearing to have been disconfirmed. In the training groups we found participants regressing and seeming to get psychologically more disturbed because in the security of the T group, they were able to let down their defenses and allow past and present disconfirmations to be experienced. Invariably these participants became “well” again much quicker than if they had had their regression at work or in a real-life situation.

## GROUP AND ORGANIZATION FORCES

The next and final step in fully understanding change is to come to terms with what happens when we go beyond the dynamics of an individual client to small group dynamics and ultimately to intergroup and interorganizational dynamics. The main point to be made here is that in OD we have tended to look only at the impact of groups and larger systems on individuals and have failed to note that some of the toughest problems of change derive from intergroup and interorganizational forces. The people who are the targets of change often are locked into positions within their own groups that make it impossible for them to move. They appear to be logical and rational, but in fact they are functioning as representatives protecting their turf and their people. Change dynamics then move into another arena of diplomacy, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and ultimately resolution by the hierarchy. I saw this dynamic play out especially in my 35-year analysis of the history of Digital Equipment Corporation (Schein, 2003). The ultimate economic demise of that organization could be directly related to irresolvable intergroup competition for resources in combination with neutralizing of the founder and CEO and the board by powerful engineering groups. The irony is that early success breeds growth, and growth breeds subgroups and subcultures that will inevitably compete with each other for resources.

The implication for OD is that interventions have to be geared to the level at which a problem is being experienced, as Coghlan and Rashford (2006) so ably argue. OD practitioners have to be able to make interventions at the individual, interpersonal, group, organizational, and interorganizational level. This is especially true when we have to take culture into account.

### ORGANIZATION CULTURE

The final piece of the change puzzle is culture. For reasons that are not entirely clear, most change programs nowadays claim to be culture change, but when one examines what is actually being changed it is revealed that the change agent is not using *culture* in any kind of clear or appropriate manner. Culture is the learned residue of past experiences and manifests itself at the level of behavioral regularities, espoused values that usually reflect aspirations more than realities, and tacit, shared assumptions that drive daily behavior (Schein, 1985b, 1992, 2006). The essence and most stable element of culture is the shared, tacit assumptions.

When change agents announce “culture change” they usually refer to the promulgation of some “new” values such as teamwork, customer focus, or quality. It is not clear whether cultural assumptions will be involved at all, nor is it clear what actual change is being promoted in the sense of new behaviors or new attitudes. To sort this out entails going back to the change model: What is being disconfirmed, what is the new behavior that is required, and how will the present culture promote or hinder this change? If there are cultural elements that will hinder the change, how will they be dealt with? In the Power Company the court mandated environmental responsibility, and the company announced new responsible behavior and then concluded that this required more openness, personal responsibility, and teamwork. Each of these new values then had to be translated into new behavior, which created

a need for training, new reward systems, and new disciplinary processes, which in each case were completely consistent with and derived from the present culture. The only culture change required was to forge a new identity for the electrical worker in the field and to abandon a tradition of assigning jobs to “old boys” who often were not competent to deal with the environmental issues. These changes could be achieved only through the paternalistic training-oriented culture that existed. The court eventually took the company off probation, and 7 years into the program there is some evidence that not only has the behavior changed, but employees have internalized the environmental values. As this internalization continues and as the new behavior is reinforced both internally and externally, it will gradually become a shared, tacit assumption that doing electrical work now includes environmental responsibility. Some elements of the culture will have changed. The implication for change management is clear:

Culture is both a facilitating and a restraining force. In change programs the focus should be on what behavioral practices are being changed, how the culture will aid or hinder the desired change, and how cultural forces can be harnessed to make the necessary behavioral changes.

### CONCLUSION

Human change is a complex process, whether we are talking at the level of the individual, the group, the intergroup, the organization, or the interorganizational set. Yet the core process of managing the components of unfreezing—disconfirmation, survival anxiety, learning anxiety, and the creation of psychological safety—will ultimately be the same at whatever level we are analyzing the process. Similarly, attitudinal or value change processes will always involve some cognitive redefinition—semantic changes in concepts, learning new concepts through

identification with others or trial-and-error learning, and shifts in the adaptation level that determine how we make our judgments. Change at this level often entails coercing the change target into remaining in the change situation. If exit is possible, career anchor theory argues that some people will leave rather than change. All of these processes are heavily influenced by the dynamics of membership and reference groups, and all of them take place in cultural settings that derive from country and occupation. The successful change agent will be able to design successfully the tactics of a change process only if he or she has a clear understanding of these underlying dynamics.

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