

“The Blind Men and the Elephant”: A Postmodern Analysis of the Resistance to Organizational Change

Yiling Ge

New Mexico State University
MSC 3DJ; P.O. Box 30001, Las Cruces, NM 88003-8001
505-646-6847
geyiling@nmsu.edu

ABSTRACT

This paper re-evaluates the concept of resistance in a postmodernist perspective based on the results of three interviews given in a public building service organization, which is undergoing an organizational change. Deconstruction, intertextuality and narrative causality analysis methods were used. The paper proposes that resistance is caused by the differences between employees' and change-initiator's subjective realities. The finding supports the view of treating resistance as a constructive tool for organizational change. The author suggests to introduce the concepts of subjective reality and postmodern in the organization and encourage employee participation and communication to overcome the resistance.

INTRODUCTION

Resistance to change has long been recognized as a critically important factor that influences the successful implementation of an organization change (Mabin, Forgeson, & Green, 2001; Maurer, 1996, 1997; Waddell & Sohal, 1998). There are two opposite views of resistance. The writers of classical organization theory viewed resistances as the obstacle to the organizational improvement and must be removed (e.g. Koopman, 1991; O'Connor 1993). As a result, many scholars focus their attentions on how to overcome the resistances from different level of the organization. There is another group of scholars who believe that the resistances can also play a useful role in organizational change (e.g. Hultman, 1979; Klein, 1969; Maurer, R., 1996; Waddell & Sohal, 1998). Rather than overcoming the resistance, organizations are suggested to fully utilized resistances to help the organization move towards a more stable position. Considering the importance of resistance to the organization, this paper aims to delve deeper in this filed, but in a postmodernist perspective. First the author reviews the concept of resistances and two opposite views of resistances briefly. Then the reasons why we need to investigate this topic from a postmodernist perspective are covered. Later, the author presents the results of a qualitative study of a public organization that is recently undergoing a change process. In this study, the author tries to re-evaluate the concept of resistance, and discuss the approaches to help organization change more smoothly.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Different authors have different definitions of resistances. But no matter how they organized their words, they commonly linked resistances with negative employee attitudes or with counter-productive behaviors (Waddell & Sohal, 1998). Resistance is caused by a number of factors. For example, individual factors, such as, parochial self-interest, fear of uncertainty, lack of confidence, habit and personality; and organizational factors, such as, lack of shared value and vision, lack of coordination and cooperation, and different assessments and goals (Daft & Noe, 2001; Mabin, Forgeson, & Green, 2001). Pardo del Val and Fuentes (2003) categorized resistances into five groups and distinguished them according to the two stages of change process: the formulation stage and the implementation stage. In the formulation stage, there are three groups of resistances. One group is called “distorted perception, interpretation barriers and vague strategic priorities”. One group deals with a low motivation for change. And the other group is the lack of a creative response. Two more groups of resistance will occur in the implementation stage. One group deals with political and cultural deadlocks to change. The last group has no specific characteristics but some sources of resistances bunched together, such as leadership inaction, embedded routines, collective action problems, capabilities gap and cynicism. For different reasons, employee would use either overt ways or covert ways to resist change (Recardo, 1995). Overt ways of resisting include sabotage, vocal opposition and agitating others. And covert ways includes reducing output, withholding information, asking for more data or studies and appointing task forces and committees. Employees can also resist the change either conscious or unconscious, which refer to the motivation of conscious (O’Connor, 1993). When the resistances are unconscious, employees usually do not realize that their behavior undermines the change. As a result, such unconscious resistances are more difficult to deal with.

In Koopman’s (1991) words, employees “will resist any change at all cost”. At the level of organization, resistance to change will not only block the implementation of organizational change plan, but also cause financial loss. Finally, organization cannot survive in this changing environment. At the level of individual, resistance can cause great stress and bad feeling (O’Connor, 1993). As a result, resistance is understood as the enemy of change, “the foe which causes a change effort to be drawn out by factional dissent and in-fighting” (Waddell & Sobal, 1998). Resistance has also been regarded as one of the causes of the conflicts that are undesirable and detrimental to organizational health (Waddell & Sobal, 1998). Even though some scholars didn’t deny the positive side of the resistance, they still believe that resistance, for the most part, is a roadblock that must be removed (e.g. Umiker, 1997). Under this perspective of change, a successful change is defined as a change that is met with little resistance (Mabin, Forgeson, & Green, 2001). Resistance is viewed to be problematic, which should be managed and overcome to ensure the success of change. And “the inability of employers and managers to cope with employee resistance can destroy organizations and careers” (Umiker, 1997)

Maurer (1996) pointed out that people with negative perspective of resistance usually employee win-lose thinking and assume that their way is the right way. Their mind is blocked by such assumptions and they believe resisters must be persuaded or forced to go along. So the way managers often used is to resist the resistance by using power, applying

force of reason, ignoring the resistance or making deals with resisters. The results of resisting the resistances are disappointing. Such approach is unable to eliminate the resistance but causes more problems. Finally, the chance of the failure of organizational change effort is increased.

“When the word resistance is mentioned, we tend to ascribe negative connotations to it. This is a misconception.” (Hultman, 1979, p. 54). Resistance is “a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that is caused by a variety of factors”, and “people do not resist change per se, rather they resist the uncertainties and potential outcomes that change can cause” (Waddell & Sohal, 1998). Some scholars started to believe that resistances also have a number of advantages and suggested treating resistance as a useful tool in an organizational change effort. When resistances are managed carefully, these advantages can be utilized to support the change. (Mabin, Forgeson, & Green, 2001; Maurer, 1996; Waddell & Sohal, 1998).

Waddell and Sohal (1998) listed several advantages of resistance that can be utilized. They believe that resistance could be seen as feedbacks to the change and points out the fallacy. Resistance can also be a force to balance the pressure from external and internal environments against the need for constancy and stability and influences the organization to greater stability. An influx of energy is another contribution of resistance because individual could gain sufficient motivation when they feel dissatisfaction with status quo or future states. What’s more, resistance encourages or forces the search for alternative methods and outcomes, which keeps the organization changing. In general, resistance could be useful in learning how to develop a more successful change process if it is considered as a source of information (Pardo del Val & Fuentes, 2003). These advantages overturn the traditional definition of successful change and urge a re-evaluating the classical understanding of resistance.

No matter what kind of attitudes these authors hold toward the resistance, most of them took a modernist perspective (Ford, Ford, & McNamara, 2001; Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996). Scholars with modernist perspective believe that individual rationality is the major source of human conducts. If we want to gain dominion over the future well-being of the organization, we need to unlock the secrets of individual rationality (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996). Within this perspective, there is only a concrete organizational reality, an objective world, capable of empirical study (Eastman & Bailey, 1994, cited in Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996). And the responsibility of the organization scientist is to isolate variables, standardize measures, and assess causal relations with the organizational sphere (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996). Assumption of empirical knowledge cause most scholars believe that everyone within the organization share the same objective and homogeneous reality, and assumption of rational agency drives the scholars to the research direction of seeking the sources of resistance accurately and finding the appropriate strategies to deal with that source (Ford, Ford, & McNamara, 2001).

According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), the reality is not totally objective reality but subjective reality. It is constructed, enacted, and interpreted through social interactions. Based on the concept of the subjective reality, postmodernist questions the concept of individual rationality and shift their assumption to the concept of communal rationality

(Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996). In this view, it is impossible for everyone has the homogeneous reality. One the contrary, “different people in different positions at different live in different reality.” (Shotter, 1993, p17, cited in Berger Ford, Ford, & McNamara, 2001). “There is no whole story to tell, only fragments, which even with retrospective sense-making, cannot find a plot that will make the fragments cohere” (Boje, 2001, p.5). In postmodernist perspective, it is improper to conclude that the resistance to change is caused by misunderstanding or individual characteristics and attributes, but caused by different constructed reality (Ford, Ford, & McNamara, 2001). And the traditional definition of resistance is questionable.

“Postmodern discourse de-centers the human agent and defends living and social bodies against the grand narrative, mechanical harmony, and functional order” (Boje, 1995). In this view, “resistance” seems no longer the traditional concept of resistance. Studying resistance in postmodernist perspective may help scholars and managers understanding the resistance in new way and provide new solutions to help organizations adapt to the changing environment. For example, Ford, Ford & McNamara (2002) propose that resistance is not an individual phenomenon, but a function of the socially constructed reality in which people are responding more to the background conversations in which the change is being initiated than to the change itself. Trader-Leigh (2002) suggests that improved identification and understanding of the underlying factors of resistance might improve implementation outcomes. Unfortunately, most researches still conduct their resistance research based on the modernist perspective. The contribution of postmodern study of resistance and organizational change is relatively weak.

Traditionally, researchers study the resistance based on the assumption that individuals treat the change as a threat. But research done by Hoag, Ritschard, and Cooper (2002) has shown that staffs often see the need for change and are anxious to just do it. Our interviews with some employees in a public organization also found similar phenomena. But the planned change of that public organization still proved ineffective. If the employees want organizational change, why the implementation of change is unsuccessful? Unfortunately, findings in the modernist perspective hard to explain such phenomena no matter what kind of attitudes the scholars hold towards the resistance to change: negative or positive. The purpose of this paper is to seek the answer of this question in postmodernist perspective. We propose that the resistance occurs because the organization and the process are different realities in the eyes of different employees, which can be described by the metaphor of “the blind men and the elephant”.

METHOD

The study was conducted in a small public organization, with three divisions. Six employees, including the director, were interviewed. The list of employees provided by the organization covers two types of positions: inspector and engineer. Most of them are male. The names of the organization, its employees and the places mentioned in the interviews have been changed in the transcripts in order to protect their confidentiality. The organization, called “BSO” here, provides building service to developers, commercials and about 180,000 residents in the county. The major services the organization provides are building plan review, building permit grant, and on-site inspection. BSO had some big changes

about a year ago, which were initiated by the director and commissioners. They adapted a new requirement of turn-around time following the city building service organization. In order to reach that goal, the whole process was simplified by excluding one function - engineering review - from building plan review service. Also one engineer was moved to another division during this time and several new engineers were recruited. The organization now is seeking the possibility of shorten the turn-around time again. The change seems successful because BSO shorten the turn-around time successfully. And the organization seems in a peace at surface. But things are not so quiet underneath. Some new problems came out after change.

Two individual interviews and one group interview were carried out. Interviewees were asked a series of pre-established questions with a limited set of response categories. Interviewees were asked to describe the building permit process in their perspective, gave comments on the performance and structure of the organization, and provided some suggestions. Each interview was last about one hour and tape-recorded. Where tape recording was not feasible, field notes were used as a supplement. Tapes were transcribed and converted to line-numbered transcripts. At the beginning of each interview, interviewees were asked to do some modifications on a basic flow chart of permit process to demonstrate their understanding of current process. The flow chart was drawn based on the information provided by OBS.

RESULTS

The author picked the stories told by three interviewees to analyze, the director who is one of the initiators of the change, an engineer and an inspector. Deconstruction, intertextuality and narrative causality analysis approaches are used in this paper. In order to evaluate the concept of resistance as comprehensive as possible, I decided to use different approaches on the narratives from different interviewees.

Deconstruction Analysis

The term "deconstruction" was coined by French philosopher Jacques Derrida in the 1960s. It is a philosophy of meaning, which deals with the ways that meaning is constructed by writers, texts, and readers. To deconstruct is to analyze the relations between the dualities in stories. The purpose to deconstruct is to show the ambiguity embedded in the texts and show "the storytelling practices used to discipline particular meanings" (Boje,1995). Boje (2001) provide eight steps to deconstruct the stories: duality search, reinterpret the hierarchy, rebel voices, other side of the story, deny the plot, find the exception, trace what is between the lines and resituation.

The stories to be deconstructed here were told by Mr. Weber. Mr. Weber is working as the director about a year, but has been with the department for three years. His responsibility involves much customers contact and attendance at frequent committee meetings. This made Mr. Weber believe that he knew the whole processes thoroughly, and was very eager to have

the processes improved. The most obvious duality in his stories is “I” and “staff”. Following are some examples.

Example 1. Meeting story

I have my staff attending any meeting that I perceive that anything of importance will take place and I always attend or have a designated person attend whenever I think a vote by us is necessary. I also pay close attention to the City of EP’s metropolitan planning organization because with demographic changes shown in the 2000 census, they now have some level of responsibility for transportation systems planning, although not roadway planning up almost to Vdao, which is 10 miles south of town. We attend all of their meetings while I perceive that they may be doing something that may influence us,

Example 2. Agricultural property story.

One of the interesting things about NNN is that it has a law not in the subdivision or zoning regulation, but under an agricultural title that states that agricultural buildings in NNN are not required having building permits. We have some people who believe this that apply to every structure related to any agricultural related property. Agricultural property is defined as any property that derives \$1000.00 or more from its annual gross income from agriculture. Well I think that oversteps that bounds a bit, but I am willing to allow you to build a cow or horse facility or a hay barn or something like that without a building permit. That’s fine, but I am not willing to allow anyone to construct a human habitation without a building permit. I am not going to permit that.

In these two stories, the word “I” appears very frequently and always in the place of subject. The word “staff” only appeared once, but also have the attribute “my” in front of it. I highlighted these words to catch the readers’ attention. It showed that Mr. Weber, the director, is the only voice in his stories. The voices of other employees, “his staff”, are marginalized. The power relationship within the organization is clear. Mr. Weber has the power and he fully used it to construct the reality: what the organization is and what it should be. He attended the meetings he perceived important. He chose the information he perceived useful. He dominated the staff. Even the employees of the BSO had become “his” staff. He totally ignored the voice of his staff. He made decisions based on his own perceptions because the context he was in made him believe that he was very knowledgeable of the organization and he had the rights and obligations to take those actions by his own. He also believed that the results of his actions were very well. This is the reality interpreted by Mr. Weber. As a result, he initiated the organizational change and decided the direction the organization should go mostly based on his own voice.

INTERTEXTUALITY ANALYSIS

According to Boje (2001), “textual analysis is no longer univocal, texts are interweaves and

permutations of many voices, conventions (protocols for social science narrative, including citation and interpretation) and audiences (as in the crowd at carnival). They are intertextual in composition and in their positions in distribution and consumption networks (i.e. corporate text analysis courses), as well as in chains of power (editors, publishers, media that own publishers, accreting bodies, designers of curriculum, science wars” (P.77). Intertextuality "is a web of complex inter-relationships ensnaring each story's historicity and situational context between other stories" (Boje, 2001: 91). Narratives derive their meaning not by reference to external reality but from their relationships to other writings. There are two dimensions of the texts. One is horizontal dimension of historicity of the texts that precede and anticipated in an intertextual system. The other is a vertical dimension of its immediate and distant contexts (Boje, 2001, p. 77). Here I choose horizontal dimension to analyze the stories of inspector Bob.

Precedent texts

Even though Bob didn't quote anyone's words directly, he did include many voices in their utterances. In order to prove that he was right, Bob "quoted" the voices of customers and the employees from the planning department indirectly.

Example 3: greed story

You have to pay a flat. There is no approval of this stuff. You cannot bring a set of plans in. The subdivision said, this is what was being proposed. All right, we will look at it, we will see. Here's the fee you should pay, There's the studies you have to do, another \$2000, \$3000. Then you go and see if we have approved, you don't even know it's gonna being approved. Here you are come up with 200 grant, you don't even know that this subdivision gonna approved in the future. Ok?

In this story, the voice of employees in the planning department was included. They took no responsibility, but were greedy because they felt superior to the customers and they had the power over the customers. So they kept asking for money without doing anything. Bob also tried to play a customer's role and speaks in customer's voice. Customers can do nothing to change the situation. Customer needs the planning department to review his plan but unable to make the planning department do anything. He/she had no choice but to satisfy the greed of the planning department by feeding their wallets. In general, Bob tried to demonstrate that the BSO, especially the planning department, just wanted money without considering for customers in this story.

Example 4: Twelve-minute story

There's guy lived up in Proad, wants another house. He had three, he wants the fourth. It took him one hour and 10 minutes to decide that. He wanted to put 100 aces down there. It took them 12 minutes to deny it. He was hassled. I would be too. You know put 100 or 200 aces down there about 1 million 2 million project. 12 minutes (laughing)

Here, the story seems very straight forward, but you can still feel the voice from this customer. It took him a long time to make the decision of purchase that land, which means that he really thought about it carefully and this project is profitable to him. As a result, he must be very eager to get a building permission. Unfortunately, the planning department denied the plan thoughtlessly. Bob cleverly used the comparison between two lengths of time, one hour and 10 minutes and 12 minutes, to demonstrate his reality: employees in the planning department took no responsibility and didn't think for customers.

Example 6: Pavement story

There's another customers come here. He got a house on that lot. He paved that lot with bricks. They said he cannot do that. I said, yes he can. He can do anything he wants to do. So he went to the engineering department. They said, he cannot. So he went to road (department). The roads said that he cannot put more than 60% percent of building of the lot. But he says nothing about the pavement. So they want red tag him for pavement his property. I said, no he can do that. They said no he cannot.... They said you cannot cover 60% more than you building. They said nothing about that. They want to rewrite it and put it in that. I said fine. Not so fast, right now the law does not say that. So they cannot enforce that because the law does not say it. They will enforce it on a lot of people because they just don't know.

In this story, more voices are included. Customer still played a role of small person. He was fooled by some employees in BSO. He didn't know what to do. He had no power and knew nothing and can only do whatever BSO told him to do, even though something is wrong. Employees in other departments, such as engineering department, were supercilious. They thought they were experts, they thought they knew what was right without reference to any written standards. They just made up their own standards and gave customers the thoughtless advice. Bob continued to play a role of hero who spoke for customers, who took his responsibility and did everything based on the written standards.

Anticipated texts

Stories told by Bob reveal the conflicts and resistances in the organization. Bob is very unsatisfied with the existing permit process. He is unsatisfied with the management of the BSO. And he is unsatisfied with the work and attitudes of employees in other departments, especially employees in the planning department. He believed that he was one of those few persons who really thought for customers, and who really did their job. Working in the different department, different context. The reality of Bob is totally different from that of Mr. Weber. Bob, as well as other inspectors, thought they really did their job well, but they doubted the working attitude of the leader and other departments. For example, *“There are people in the leadership positions, they are not leaders. They just get money. They just get pays for it. They want deny everything, everything is denied.” “I think what it is, if you say no, you have power; if you say yes, all your power's gone.”* Bob and other inspectors believed that some standards needs to be set up rather than shortening turn around time. For example, *“We call for it (the standard). We handed it out and called for it. They just*

don't follow it". The reality of Bob is different from that of Mr. Weber. As an inspector, Bob has to be in the field all day long. He has more chances to see the problems in the field. He believed he knew what the real problems of the organization were and where should be changed.

NARRATIVE CAUSALITY ANALYSIS

Causal analysis is empirically attempts to relate two events by asserting the occurrence of one event to be the mechanical reason for the occurrence of the other (Boje, 2001). "A standard narrative analysis consists of identifying through content analysis the causal assertions in various texts and composing these into aggregate causal maps of the firm" (Boje, 2001, p95). There are three types of narrative causality: physical or generative narrative causality; psychological narrative causality; and successionist narrative causality. "An antenarrative approach views causal assertions as portals into an intertextual world" (Boje, 2001: p95). Causal assertion, defined by Boje (2001, p95) "is the principle that an antecedent event can be necessary and sufficient for the occurrence of a subsequent event, or that a set of events is thought to be chained together". An antenarrative analysis would call into question mechanical as well as successionist accounts of narrative causality. It would also question how causal assertions are made and what they mean when analytically aggregated into causal maps or stream charts to render the entire organization" (Boje, 2001, P. 102).

The text I analyzes here is an interview with David, who worked as an engineer to review the plan for fifteen years but just moved to another department a year ago for some reason. His comments on the performance of the organization were not very good. He said: "*my opinion is this system doesn't work*". And he didn't think the change happened one year ago improved the performance and efficiency of the service, on the contrary, he believed the quality of the service was lowered after that. For example, "*and it's got worse this last year; it used to work a whole lot better. But, of course, the turnaround was somewhere between three and ten days.*" There are many reasons caused David made such conclusion, and the causal map is a little bit complicated. The causal map, which could help readers understand the narrative causality analysis, is included in part of Appendix.

The root of the problem, in David's perspective, is that the commissioners have the wrong mission and focus on wrong customers group. David believed the safety of general public is the most important issue that BSO should pay attention to. But the change occurred in the organization, just made the developers happier because their profit could be increased with shorter turn around time, but the safety of the general public was threatened.

Well, I've always thought that the process was to protect the clients, not to make them happy. It's to protect the general public from everybody else that's out there, the "Big Bad Wolf," the developers, the builders. We're here to protect them. Now, if we're trying to appease the builder -- usually the consumer pays the -- their -- By make -- streamlining this process and cutting -- saying the engineering review out, somebody pays at the tail end, and it's probably not gonna be the builder; it's gonna be the guy that buys

that house and has to live there and live with the drainage running off of his neighbor up to his property. It seems that what we're trying to do is trying to help out the wrong group and trying to cater to the builders instead of to the -- what we're supposed to be doing is protecting the general public, not only the ones that permit, but everybody around them.

Engineering review is a very complex process, which takes time. There are not enough engineers in the department to review the plans. As a result, engineering review always delays the turn-around time. The commissioners wanted to carry out 3-day-turn-around policy, while engineering department needed longer time for engineering review. However, communication within BSO was poor. Commissioners, directors and other departments don't know the importance of the engineering review and don't understand why engineering review would take such a long time. Unfortunately, people, including David himself, cannot find other solutions to shorten the turn around time without ignoring the engineering review. Finally decision to ignore the engineering review was made. All these reasons cannot lead to the effect alone, but when they happened together, the effect – ignoring engineering review – happened.

The low quality of the new employees, inexperienced engineers, is also sufficient to lower quality of the permit process. Inexperienced engineers didn't know how to do things in the best way because their work not only depends on the knowledge learned from the book, but more depend on their experience. As a result, experienced engineers had to spend more time helping these inexperienced engineers, which added the workload of these experienced engineers and lower the quality of their job.

David: See, I was in Engineering Department for 15 years, and everybody else that's in the Engineering Department, this is their first year; it's a -- it's complete new department as far as personnel, except for the right-of-way coordinator,.....

Interviewer: Do you think that's good?

Interviewer: Do you think there should be more experience?

David: I think there should be more experience 'cause I'm having to spend a lot of time that I need elsewhere to help you

David's saw another different reality, which can tell from his stories. Engineering review is something related to the safety of the building. Working as an engineer for 15 years, he regarded safety of the general public is the top principle. As a result, the importance of engineering review process is more important and should never be excluded from the permit process.

THE BLIND MEN AND THE ELEPHANT

Before I continue to discuss the results and the implications of the study, let us read an old Indian parable called “the blind men and the elephant”. The story is talking about six blind men who happened to have a chance to “see” an elephant the first time in their life. The first blind men approached the elephant and happened to touch the broad and sturdy side of

the elephant. So he concluded that the elephant was nothing but a wall. The second man touched the tusk of the elephant and concluded that the elephant was like a spear. The third one happened to take the squirming trunk with his hands. He believed that the elephant was very like a snake. The fourth felt about the knee, and told other blind men that it was very clear that the elephant was like a tree. The fifth person, who chanced to touch the ear, disagreed with others and said the elephant was like a fan. The last person seized on the swinging tail that fell within his scope and said the elephant was very like a rope! These men started to dispute and everyone believed in his own opinion very stiffly and strongly. Each of them only right in part but wrong in the whole.

In the organization, the situation is similar. This paper proposes that the resistance occurs because the organization and the process are different realities in the eyes of different employees. Employees are just like the blind men in the story mentioned above. The reality of an employee is formed through his/her interaction with the context, especially through conversation. Due to the division of labor and different job responsibilities, they understand the function of certain parts of the organization and the environment influences on the organization, mostly the part of the organization he or she contacted most. As a result, they have different interpretations of the reality. It is hard for employees to accept the notion that their world is a product of their conversation. They just believe that their conversation is the reflection of the existing world (Ford, Ford, & McNamara). Employees have different interpretations of the organization and the problems the organization is facing. But the whole organization reflected in each employee's understanding and conversation is actually only part of the whole story. When their reflection of their world cannot consist with that of the change initiator, it is very hard for them to accept the change plan easily. Then resistance occurs.

In the BSO, the three persons whose stories were analyzed have different understandings of the organization and organizational change. When they were asked to show their understanding of the current permit process based on a flow chart, no two copies were the same. Mr. Weber, as the director, believed the whole organization should center on him. He believed that when he was chosen as the leader, his knowledge and abilities to lead the organization had been convinced. He had the right and abilities to decide the change the organization should make. As the director, he had more chance to hear the complaints from the developers rather than residents, which made him realize that the turn-around time should be shortened. In addition, the regulations set by other building services had a lot of influence on his decision, because he had more contact with other people in the same business. Actually, the new turn-around time was adapted from the city building service organization. But he didn't know everything in deed. He had less chance to learn the safety-related problems faced by the general public and knew less about the reality within the engineering department. His stories also showed his consideration of safety problems for the public, but not so serious as the other two employees. So he neglected the safety issue not by purpose when introducing the change.

David, used to be an engineer, knew the part of engineering review the most. He saw some problems faced by the final customers and understood that these problems were caused by neglecting or improper engineering review. In his perspective, safety issue was much more

important than the long turn-over time. So he didn't understand why organization decided to sacrifice the safety of general public. Bob, the inspectors, believed that he knew what the organization should do because he is the person in the field all the time and always received phone calls from the planning department asking for help. His job let him see a lot of problems when and after customers build their houses. So he believed that the problems faced the organization are more internal, such as lack of standard and irresponsibility of employees in the planning department. Similar to David, he believed the safety of general public is more important and engineering review should not be ignored.

Interestingly, all of them, especially David and Bob, showed strong eager to make some changes to improve the performance of the organization and even wanted to initiate some changes. For examples, they all admitted that the quality of the service was low and needs some change. Bob and other inspectors called for standards within the organization. David tried several ways to improve the efficiency of the engineering review even though they failed. So it is improper to say that employees have negative attitude towards the change. The reason why there are some resistances existed towards the current change ongoing in BSO is because each of them only touch part of the whole system. Everyone believed that he/she knew exactly what the organization was and what the problems were and had the different interpretation of what the change should be. They cannot learn the reality of others with limited conversations between them. Then disagreement on the change, especially the disagreement between Mr. Weber and other two employees, caused occurrence of the resistance, even though such resistances are covert and sometimes unconscious.

This study re-evaluates the concept of resistance with narrative methods of deconstruction, intertextuality and narrative causality, which seldom used in the study of organizational change and is the value of this study. Rather than linking resistance to negative employee attitudes or with counter-productive behaviors, the author suggests to link the resistance to the disagreement between employees' and change initiator's realities. This proposal supports the view of regarding resistance as a constructive tool to change. Remove resistance means forming consistent reality within the organization.

This study also has some contribution in practical. The findings of the study suggest strongly the requirements of employee participation and communication. That's not enough. Everyone in the organization, especially leaders, must be taught about the concepts of subjective reality and postmodern. Because it will help people open their minds and include the realities of others into their own. Introducing concepts of subjective reality and postmodernist could also encourage employee participation and better communication within the organization and come out shared value, vision and mission. When people in the organization realize that they only know part of the organization and problem and the possibility of understanding the whole system would be increase though more communications, they will listen to others. This will help them have some agreement upon the direction of the change through conversations. Actually, everyone in the organization, not only managers and some assigned employees, should become the change initiators. They are encouraged to participate in the whole procedure of change, from initiating a change, designing the change plan with others, to implementing the plan and

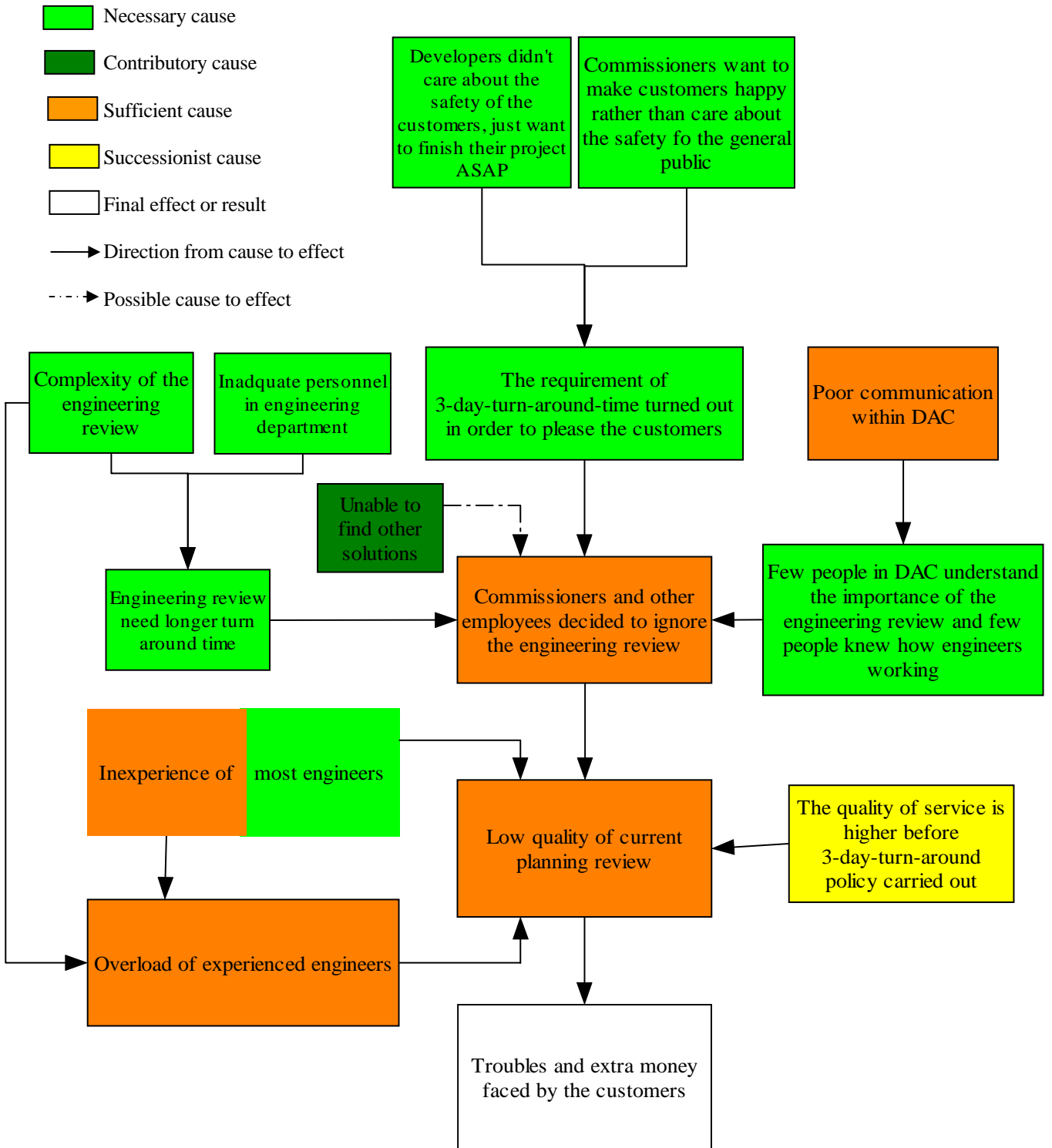
modifying the actions. The motivation of the employees towards change could be improved. Suggestions to the change plan would increase because of employee participation. Employees could understand each other more easily because of increased communication. And employees would be more open to different opinions because their understanding of concepts of subjective reality and postmodernist.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, the re-evaluate the concept of resistance in a postmodernist perspective and propose that the resistance occurs because the employees' interpretation of the organization and organizational change is different from change initiator's interpretation. Overcoming the gaps between the different subjective realities could help the organization change to the right direction more smoothly and increase the chance of success. In order to build consistent realities, concepts of subjective reality and postmodernist should be introduced. Of course, there are some limitations of this study. First, the author only studied one public organization, where the resistance is more covert. Different organizations should be investigated to verify the results. Second, the interviewees were not picked randomly but by the organization. Third, there are only three interviews in this study. The data is related small, which decrease the validity of the results. Fourth, the coverage of samples is related small since only the director, an engineer and several inspectors are included. For example, the stories told by David and Bob showed some negative attitudes towards the planning department. It is pity that we are lacking of data from that source. In the future, different types of organizations could be studied and solutions of overcome the gap between different realities needs to be explored.

APPENDIX

Casual Map: What causes the low quality of the permit process - from the engineer's perspective



REFERENCES

- Boje, D. M. (2001). *Narrative Methods for Organizational and Communication Research*. London: Sage.
- Boje, D. M. (1995). Stories of the storytelling organization: A postmodern analysis of Disney as "Tamara-land". *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(4): 997-1035.
- Daft, R. L., & Noe, R. A. (2001). *Organizational Behavior*. Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, Inc.
- Ford, J. D., Ford, L. W., & McNamara, R. T. (2002). Resistance and the background conversations of change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 15(2): 105-121.
- Gergen, K. J., & Thatchenkery, T. J. (1996). Organization science as social construction: Postmodern potentials. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 32(4): 356-377.
- Hoag, B. G., Ritschard, H. V., & Cooper, C. L. (2002). Obstacles to effective organizational change: the underlying reasons. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 23(1/2):6-15.
- Hultman, K. (1979). *The Path of Least Resistance: Preparing Employees for Change*. Denton, TX: Learning Concepts.
- Klein, D. (1996). Some Notes on the dynamics of resistance to change: The defender role. In Bennis, W.G., Benne, K. D., Chin, R., and Corey, K.E. (Ed.). *The Planning of Change (3rd ed)*, (pp. 117-126). New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Koopman, A. (1991). *Transcultural Management*. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell.
- Mabin, V. J., Forgeson, S., & Green, L. (2001). Harnessing resistance: Using the theory of constraints to assist change management. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 25(2/3/4): 168-191.
- Maurer, R. (1997). Transforming resistance. *HR Focus* 74(10): 9-10.
- Maurer, R. (1996). Using resistance to build support for change. *Journal for Quality & Participation*, 19(3): 56-63
- Mabin, V.J., Forgeson, S.F., & Green, L. (2001). Harnessing resistance: Using the theory of constraints to assist change management. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 25(2/3/4): 168-191.
- O'Connor, C. A. (1993). Resistance: The repercussions of change. *Leadership & Organization development Journal*, 14(6): 30-36.
- Pardo del Val, M. & Fuentes, C. M. (2003). Resistance to change: a literature review and empirical study. *Management Decision*, 41(2):148-155.
- Recardo, R. J. (1995). Overcoming resistance to change. *National Productivity Review*, 14(5):5-12.
- Trader-Leigh, K. E. (2002). Case study: Identifying resistance in managing change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 15(2): 138-155.
- Umiker, W. (1997). How to prevent and cope with resistance to change. *Health Care Supervisor*, 15(4): 35-41.
- Waddell, D & Sohal, A.S. (1998). Resistance: A constructive tool for change management. *Management Decision* 36(8): 543.