DIAGNOSING SALES FORCE CHANGE RESISTANCE:  
WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM  
THE ADDICTION LITERATURE

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Current change issues represent a symptom of a larger problem -- the inevitability of change and salesperson efforts to resist change. As change will continue to occur, change agents will continue to cope with resistance to change. Resistance can be about today's change, but also about change in general. The premise of this paper is that sales organizations can learn much about managing change processes from researchers and practitioners that have dealt with change resistance and addictive behaviors. In this paper, we present a model for overcoming change resistance in a sales organization. This model includes four key elements: 1) creating a program to manage change resistance, 2) preparing change agents for change resistance, 3) helping sales managers to understand the nature of sales force resistance and addictive behaviors, and 4) providing proactive sales force assistance.

INTRODUCTION

It seems that the most common headlines concerning organization change initiatives like TQM and CRM read something like, “Latest Change Effort by Company X Fails to Yield Desired Results.” Indeed, one source suggests that change initiatives achieve their goals only 40 to 60 percent of the time (Karn and Highfill 2004). When surveys of significant and recent changes impacting sales organizations are taken, it is evident that change is commonplace. Sales force change topics include technology, new ways to conduct business, transforming company culture, outsourcing, globalization, and developing long-term customer relationships. In sales, quotes like, “The sales field is changing,” have become as commonplace as the old adage “find a need and fill it.” With all the emphasis on change and all the strategies and tactics designed to effect change in organizations, why have so many change efforts not lived up to expectations?

An easy answer is that salespeople are resistant to change. But this answer is not acceptable if the assertion of Kotter (1995), that individual resistance to change in the workplace is a rarity is on the mark. He suggested that an organization’s structure or its performance appraisal and compensation system create obstacles to change. Most people do not inherently resist change. Rather, when aspects of an organization are not aligned with desired behaviors, the desired behaviors are simply not done. A premise of this paper is that organizations experience change success because they focus on involving their people and are able to minimize barriers to change that lead to change resistance. They create desire, motivation, and commitment among individuals and groups so that change can be implemented.

The purpose of this paper is to apply some of what is known from the behavioral addiction literature to change resistance issues related to the salesforce. An addiction is an activity or substance that is repeatedly craved for the experience and for which people are often willing to pay a price, if necessary (Horvath 1999). The paper seeks to address the call by Kahle (2003) concerning sales force change, asking
the question, “How do you change the behavior of an experienced sales force?” Stated another way, how do you change the routine, almost addiction-like behaviors of the salesperson who has been successful, but whose sales strategies may becoming obsolete (Coletti and Chonko 1997)? Today’s change issues represent a symptom of a larger problem -- the inevitability of change. Change will continue to occur. Thus, resistance about today’s change must be managed. It is proposed that sales organizations can learn much about managing change processes from researchers and practitioners that have dealt with change resistance and addictive behaviors.

The paper will take the following course. First, we discuss resistance to change. We next discuss the relationship between addiction-like behavior and resistance to change. We then explain a four-step program for managing salesperson resistance to change initiatives. We close with thoughts on the value of expectancy theory and the addiction literature in helping to more effectively manage sales force change initiatives and offer directions for future research efforts.

**RESISTANCE TO CHANGE**

Resistance to change has been discussed as a barrier to organizational change attempts for decades (e.g., Lewin 1947; Lawrence 1954; Adams et al. 2004). Coetese (1999) articulated a common thread in the change resistance literature - that resistance to change involves a continuum of behaviors ranging from passive resistance to aggressive resistance including sabotage. Kaplan (1997) ascribed resistance to the user’s lack of knowledge or reluctance to change. Others have observed that resistance to change is a significant source of implementation problems (e.g., Jiang et al. 2000; Lorenzi and Riley 2000). Reger et al. (1994) discussed the challenges of organizational change, the key problem being resistance to change. Waldron (2005) supported their work, observing that resistance to change occurs for reasons such as fear of change, difficulty in changing, fear of new technology, lack of belief in changes, lack of patience for the benefits of change, concern for job security, and opposition to new tasks. However, and recently, the “people resist change” maxim has been questioned (Kotter 1995).

Bartunek (1993) observed that most discussions of change resistance are from the perspective of the change agent. Any behavior not in line with the change agent’s notions of change is viewed as resistance. For example, suppose a change agent makes the fundamental attribution that older salespeople are likely to resist change. The result may be a self-fulfilling prophecy and change is less likely to occur successfully. Dent and Goldberg (1999) expanded on this notion, even calling for a discontinuance of the phrase “resistance to change.” They, too, asserted that people do not necessarily resist change. People do, however, resist the perceived potential of such things as the loss of pay, status or comfort associated with change. In sum, experts on change such as Bartunek (1993) and Senge (1990) have challenged previous assumptions about individual behavior, focusing attention on the overall system of change, and considering the role change agents play in fostering the resistance they are trying to overcome.

**BEHAVIORAL ADDICTIONS AND RESISTANCE TO CHANGE**

Arguably, change is a natural phenomenon. As people age, mature, and learn, they do many things differently. Why, then, is there so much discussion about change resistance? One reason may be that much of the change literature is prescriptive in nature, often focusing on organization level change or group level change (Whelan-Barry et al. 2003). The literature is thin concerning how individuals change. Lewin (1958) proffered a model that includes terms such as unfreeze, move or change, and refreeze to describe individual change behavior. Others (e.g., Bartunek 1984; George and Jones 2001; Hunter et al. 2002) have approached individual change from different perspectives. The psychological literature has examined individ-
ual change in an effort to understand how people overcome addiction (e.g., Mahoney 1991; Prochaska et al. 1992).

The term “addiction” has been often casually used to describe a person’s relationship to a job, significant other, or the Internet. Science has traditionally limited its use of the term to substances (Holden 2001). However, this appears to be changing, a new focus is being based on knowledge of the brain’s reward system - where there is reward there is vulnerability to compulsion. Thus, many researchers are moving toward a definition of addiction based more on behavior (Schäffer 1999). Expectancy theory provides one explanation of behavior asserting that individuals having expectations of specific reinforcing effects such as the outcome of performing the behavior in question. Whether the outcome expectation is accurate is not the question; the expectations of outcomes simply need to be held by the individual. Outcome expectancy theory has a social learning perspective (Rotter et al 1972; Bandura 1977).

Outcome expectancy theory combines principles of learning with constructs based on cognitive processes that are not directly observable (White et al. 1990). Social learning suggests that particular behavioral expectations held by an individual are the result of direct and indirect experiences with behaviors. However, these behavioral and outcomes histories will vary from one individual to the next. Simply stated, positive expectations represent an important component of the motivation to engage in a behavior while negative expectations represent an important component of motivation to restrain from a behavior (Jones and McMahon 1998). Thus, expectancy theory along with a social learning framework offers a framework for the examination of change resistance motivations by providing the opportunity to address the dual motivation conundrum to behave and to restrain, not simply to restrain (Jones 2001). Expectancy theory is not proposed as the sole explanatory mechanism for change resistant behavior. However, evidence does exist that there is a link between expectancies and addictive behaviors such as alcohol consumption (e.g., Goldman et al. 1999). Thus, it would seem that expectancy theory would offer insights into change resistant behavior.

If expectancy theory has application in understanding change resistant behavior of salespeople in organizations, there should be relationships between behavioral outcomes expectancies salespeople hold and the behaviors they undertake. It would be expected that positive associations exist between positive expectancies and organizationally desired change behaviors and negative associations between negative expectations and organizationally desired change behaviors.

In recent years, attempts to understand and assess addiction belief systems have increased (Luke et al. 2002). Applying this work to the sales force, a salesperson’s belief system will influence his/her perceptions of change. Understanding the behavioral belief systems of salespeople is important for several reasons. First, understanding beliefs can be useful in dealing with expectancies that may be at the root of resistance to change. Second, an understanding of belief systems will allow change agents to establish goals pertinent to the salespeople who are change resistant. Further, an understanding of the belief system will allow change agents to match change strategies and rewards for implementing change that are pertinent to the individual (Moyers et al 1993; Humphreys et al. 1996). Salesperson with various reasons for addictive behavior may require different strategies to cope (Fiorentine and Hillhouse 2000).

The study of behavioral addictions, from an expectancy perspective, can add to the understanding of change resistance in sales organizations. Behavioral addictions can be viewed as competing commitments that engender change resistance and may, indeed, be capable of providing explanation for the “to change or not to change” conflicts faced by salespeople. Discovery of competing commitments can offer logical explanations for change resistant salesforce behavior that often appears as irrational and ineffective (Kegan and Lahey 2001).
example, suppose a salesperson is assigned responsibilities as part of a sales team created to improve long-term relationships with key accounts. Suppose further that the salesperson elects to minimize his/her involvement in the change to a team approach as the salesperson holds negative outcome expectancies regarding teams. If management views this salesperson as restricting progress, the salesperson is challenged as to why. In conference with management the salesperson agrees that the team has been ineffective and even agrees that his/her resistance to the change to a team focus has been a major reason for that ineffectiveness. The salesperson indicates that he/she is committed to team success as he/she is committed to company success, and agrees to change his/her behavior. However, some time later, no behavioral change is evident. Subsequently, it is discovered that, while the salesperson is truly committed to the success of the team, he/she also holds the competing commitment of servicing his/her customers. The salesperson’s expectations might be described as a fear that a team-focused success might change his/her customer relationships. Further, the salesperson may have held the expectancy that he/she was not up to managing both sets of demands.

In this case, the non-participating salesperson’s negative expectancy motivates an addiction-like behavioral tendency toward status quo which produces a state of tension on the part of the salesperson with respect to the desire for new team focused behavior. The urge created by this salesperson’s “addiction” to servicing his/her customers properly was a long-lasting and uncomfortable one in the context of the change to a team focus. The salesperson may experience something akin to relief when his/her urge to service customers in accustomed ways is acted upon and such action results in success, reinforcing the likelihood of repeat behaviors. In other words, the change resistant behavior revolving around desire for servicing customers drives the salesperson’s anxieties away but does not conform to the team concept. Like addictive behaviors, change resistant behaviors are learned behaviors that are acquired through trial and error and through observing others. They can also be misconstrued as the cause of change resistance but may, indeed, be the result of outcome expectancies associated with alternative behaviors.

Five features define an addiction and serve to distinguish addictive behavior from other behaviors (Tomer 2001).

Habit: A behavioral pattern done often, easily, automatically, and triggered by a particular situation after a long stream of choices. The use of the expression “we’ve always done it this way” can simply be a habit. According to Becker (1992), an addiction is defined as a strong habit. A salesperson’s habit becomes addiction-like when the effects of past behaviors on present behaviors are sufficiently strong to appear dysfunctional to the sales organization. For example, when a salesperson’s practice of making personal calls on customers becomes dysfunctional (e.g., customers are not covered, or customers are annoyed by seemingly constant personal visits in an electronic world), the salesperson must change calling habits. However, the habit of personal calls may be so strong that the salesperson resists changing because he/she has been successful with the personal call contact approach. The habit takes on the characteristics of an addiction.

Harmfulness: Performing the addictsing behavior results in negative psychological, sociological or physical side effects. Salespeople who resist a particular change may be viewed as pariahs, their talents not being invoked even when their talents might be just what are needed. The salesperson who is resistant to behavioral change may be viewed as an outcast by colleagues and management. Further, the pressure to conform to the desired change may result in negative physical outcomes to the salesperson that places excessive demands on him/herself to maintain sales levels by relying on personal calls while, at the same time, engaging in a debate with oneself about the merits of a particular change initiative.
Dependence: The behavior is performed as if the individual salesperson depends on the behavior for certain rewards. Under dependence conditions, a salesperson that resists a particular change does not change as such change might be viewed as an admission of error. Therefore the sales representative continues to be change averse so he/she can feel “right.” To offset the harmfulness experienced in item 2, the salesperson may create his/her own personal reward set based on various outcomes associated with personal calls. If the organization and team colleagues are not viewed as reward sources, salespeople will seek rewards elsewhere.

Compulsion: Behavioral addicts do not simply desire, want or need to perform a particular behavior. They experience a craving, an uncomfortable and addiction-like response compelling the particular behavior. Compulsion is one step beyond dependence, with salespeople seeking more and more justification for their opposition to a proposed change. If the work situation brought on by the change becomes too negative, the salesperson may develop a dependence that leads him/her to making more personal calls, seeking rewards externally, while, at the same time, non-verbally indicating opposition to the wisdom of the current change initiative.

Deprivation: If the addictive behavior is not performed, addicts experience withdrawal. Some salespeople may become so set in their ways that they actively seek out others to voice their opposition to change. The resistance to change has become so strong that it drives salespeople to take on some of the characteristics of terrorists, discussed later in the paper. Here, the salesperson may finally give in and try a new sales approach. However, the pull of the addictive-like past behavior can be so strong that the salesperson experiences something akin to withdrawals and may actively express concern about the behavioral changes required as per their effectiveness with customers.

In the context of change, there are a number of organizational addictions that can impede change efforts. These are presented in Table 1. Also shown in Table 1 are some potential realities. Expectancy theory provides an opportunity to assess a salesperson’s motivation to change and may provide an explanation for change resistance and the adoption of addiction-like behaviors. For example, often the status quo is equated with mediocrity. However, many (or most) salespeople want to change, grow, be different and be liberated from routine. However, resistance to change occurs for a variety of reasons and may be undertaken to protect the status quo of good pay, good customer relations, and so on (Rusaw 2000). When resistance to change occurs, inferences are made by management about that resistance and how it impedes change progress. In other words, certain behaviors observed in salespeople can be interpreted as dysfunctional (and may, indeed, be) to change initiatives. Methodologies from the addiction treatment literature offer some useful insights to remedy situations that foster change resistance.

Core beliefs such as those “addictions” described in Table 1 are the salesperson’s realities. They are difficult to change. A salesperson resisting a proposed change might formulate the expectancy “with this change comes reduced job satisfaction.” Experiences occur that might come in conflict with this core belief—as when a sales organization decides to implement a change. When change situations occur, salespeople develop instrumentalities that help them cope with these conflicting experiences such as, “If I make the change, my customers will buy less, and my income will suffer,” making the activation of the core expectancy, “with this change comes reduced job satisfaction,” much more pronounced. The set of core beliefs and rules may also be supported by protective behaviors that prevent situations from leading to the activation of the core belief. For example, the salesperson with negative expectancies toward change might engage in inauthentic behaviors (they talk the walk) to suggest that he/she is in favor of the change. Salespeople may also experience automatic thoughts to reinforce their reasoning for resisting a particular change. For example, not really wanting to engage in change might lead to the automatic
TABLE 1  
Organization Addictions that Impede Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Addiction</th>
<th>Reality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addiction to Mediocrity?</td>
<td>Most salespeople are willing to change, to grow, to be different, to be liberated from their routines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction to Information?</td>
<td>In the salesperson’s day-to-day activities, people will take time to do things that are truly meaningful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction to Structural Change?</td>
<td>People want to “feel” better as a result of change and they want to be motivated to learn and serve. Changing structure does not provide for this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction to Committees, Task Forces, etc.?</td>
<td>Change management is best done by a few trusted, talented, and equipped individual salespeole as leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction to Young Salespeople as the Future of the Organization?</td>
<td>It is the experienced salespeople in the organization who can exercise their talents to effect change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction to Change Resistant Behaviors?</td>
<td>Salespeople seeking self-worth will commit to expressing their inner values if they are affirmed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction to Change Conducive Behaviors?</td>
<td>Spontaneity, flexibility, and planned stress management are part of authentic vision, but must be understood by salespeople before they are useful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction to the Recommendations of Change Management “Experts”?</td>
<td>Salespeople on the fringe of organizational life can be the key to discerning the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction to Bureaucratic/Organizational Consensus?</td>
<td>If action is called for, find gifted salespeople and turn them loose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction to Hierarchical Status?</td>
<td>Every salesperson is a trainer, motivator, leader, and visionary in a change initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction to Seeking Out Young People as the Agents of Change?</td>
<td>The keys to change are transformed salespeople who are gifted, called, and equipped to manage the change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction to Job Tunneling?</td>
<td>Trained salespeople who are free to take initiative will find whatever help they need.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

thought, “If I work harder than any other salespeople, I will produce more sales and no one will be concerned if I did not implement the suggested changes”.

It would be unusual for a salesperson that has the core belief that change leads to job dissatisfaction to feel dissatisfied all the time. Salespeople have experiences which will conflict with this belief. For example, a salesperson might be rewarded for efforts with a key customer. Thus, the salesperson who obtains approval from others might develop expectancies such as, “If I make the change and my manager approves of my work, I might be more satisfied with my job.” However, a salesperson might also develop instrumentality thoughts like the following: “If I produce more sales than other salespeople, even if I do not make the change, my income will increase” or “If I sell more than other salespeople, even if I do not make the change, I will earn ‘salesperson of the year’ recognition.” How important job satisfaction or income or recognition are to the salesperson (valence) will influence his/her willingness to change. Salespeople will ask questions like, “Do I want higher income? Greater recognition? Better bonuses?” However, how important the satisfaction of customers is might also be influential. The value the individual salesperson places on these outcomes will drive courses of action deemed highest in likelihood of achieving these rewards.
LEADING SALESPERSON BEHAVIORS IN TIMES OF CHANGE

In the remaining part of this paper, a four-step procedure is suggested as appropriate when attempting to elicit positive reactions to change in the sales force. This procedure, summarized in Figure 1, includes the following: (1) creating a program to manage change resistance, (2) preparing change agents for change resistance, (3) understanding the nature of sales force resistance and addictive behaviors and (4) providing proactive sales force assistance.

In any dynamic sales environment change is inevitable, thus resistance by some salespeople is inevitable. However, it must be recognized that much resistance may occur as salespeople seek to avoid the “pain” of any single change. Salespeople will resist change they associate with “painful” outcomes such as reduced pay, less job satisfaction, and increased workload. Further, salespeople may not even be aware of change (Chen 2005). They can, however, be attracted to change that produces positive results. Therefore, sales organizations must strive to move from a state of change resistance to a state of change readiness – the cognitive precursor to the behaviors of either resistance to change or support for change (Armenakis et al. 1993). To do so requires that sales organizations develop an understanding of salesperson addiction-like behaviors and develop programs to lead change.

STEP 1: CREATE A PROGRAM TO MANAGE CHANGE RESISTANCE

Goodman and Truss (2004) provide a focus for the process identified in Figure 1, presenting a communications model which incorporates message, media, channel, and approach. These are depicted as the four aspects of communications over which change agents have control. However, management of these four elements is contingent on the organizational context, the nature of the change program, the purpose of communication and salesperson response (Balogun and Hope-Hailey 2003; Armenakis and Harris 2002; Klein 1996).

To motivate salesperson behavioral change and to effect change in a sales organization, an ongoing program to manage change resistance is necessary. A sales organization must create a system of discovery that enables it to sense change, monitor change, and deal with the problems, opportunities, and challenges associated with such change (Morgan 1996). The sense-making process advocated by Weick (1996) is important for such a change sensing program as sales organizations must be sensitive to their environments. However, before this program is implemented, sales organizations must conduct a needs assessment survey to help understand their current situation and determine exactly what is needed to accomplish sales force change. This is not news. However, what may be news is that part of the needs assessment survey must consist of understanding the transformation process that salespeople prone to change resistance must undergo if they are to embrace a change and continue to be productive sales force members. Those skilled in dealing with substance addictions recommend that asking several questions (see Table 2) derived from the change addiction literature can yield valuable insights into change resistance that exists in the sales force.

Such questions focus on ascertaining the benefits being derived by salespeople performing addiction-like behaviors. For example, in the sales call scenario presented earlier, the salesperson is still deriving benefit from making personal calls while avoiding other contact methodologies. This is true even when some customers are calling for change. The salesperson does not view changing contact behavior as leading to desirable and/or improved outcomes and, therefore, resists change. Thus, it is critical that any sales organization wishing to implement a change must address questions like the following: (1) What benefits are being received by salespeople routinely performing current sales behaviors? (2) How important are these benefits? (3) Do salespeople dislike anything about the current routine behaviors? (4) Do salespeople have fears about what their lives would be like if they continue performing the current routine behaviors? Answers to
TABLE 2
Uncovering the Roots of Addiction-Like Behaviors

- What is it that salespeople like about their current behaviors? What does engaging in these behaviors do for them? What would their sales results be like if they did not engage in the addiction-like behaviors?
- What salesperson feelings or moods are improved as a result of performing the addiction-like behaviors?
- With what feelings or moods does the addiction-like behavior help salespeople cope (e.g., frustration, resentment, anxiety, and tension)? How does it help salespeople cope with them?
- What positive feelings does the addiction-like behavior enhance among salespeople?
- How much more productive would salespeople be if they were willing to change their behaviors? How much more success would the individual salesperson have?
- How painful would it be for a salesperson to withdraw from the addiction-like behavior?
- To what extent does the addiction-like behavior reduce salesperson stress, tension, anxiety, etc.?
- How much does the individual salesperson enjoy engaging in the addiction-like behavior?
- How does performance of the addiction-like behavior allow salespeople to socialize and fit in?
- How much does the individual salesperson seem to need to engage in the addiction-like behavior to feel normal?
- How often does the individual salesperson engage in the addiction-like behavior to cope with conflict?

FIGURE 1
A Four-Step Program for Effective Sales Force Change

create a program to manage change resistance

prepare change agents for change resistance

understand the nature of sales force resistance and addictive behaviors

provide proactive sales force assistance

Aspects of Sales Force Motivation

Understanding………..
- The process of change
- Sales force motivation to change
- The level of individual salesperson readiness to change
- The role change resistors can play
- The types of resistance behaviors that exist
- The role of imbalance in addictive behavior

- Explanation of why change is useful, in general.
- Explanation of why the specific change initiative is needed. This should include benefits to the sales force.

questions like these will uncover many reasons for potential change resistance that comes in the form of routinely performed behaviors that seem to take on addictive qualities. Therefore, messages dealing with change resistance issues should contain several elements including the following:
Diagnosing Sales Force Change Resistance: . . . .

- A clear description of positive and negative behaviors that can enhance or detract from the effectiveness of the change initiative.
- Explanation of the benefits and consequences that will occur depending on the degree of success of change implementation.

To understand the impact of outcome expectations on change behavior, we can borrow from the literature on alcohol. Expectancies have been shown to be more consistently associated with quantity of alcohol consumed rather than frequency of consumption (e.g., Fromme and D’Amico 2000). Thus, in an organizational setting, an appropriate research question might concern the examination of the relationship between expectancies and both the frequency and intensity of change resistant behavior.

Studies concerning alcohol have shown that expectancies can explain incremental variance in frequency and quantity of drinking (Mooney et al. 1987), but the variance explained is reduced when previous drinking behavior or attitudes toward alcohol are included in the analysis (Carey 1995). Such findings suggest several research questions appropriate in sales force change settings: 1) What is the impact of sales force expectancies on frequency of change resistant or change consistent behavior? 2) How is this relationship modified by experience with change programs?, and 3) How is this relationship modified by attitudes toward change (in general and with respect to company specific initiatives)?

Sales force change can occur only when new ideas are put into practice with effectiveness. Thus, communication must impact salespeople’s perceptions of the proposed change, their thinking about the proposed change (e.g., discovering and selecting among change alternatives) and behavioral change. Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) observed a pervasive “knowledge vs. doing” gap in organizations. Knowledge must be converted to action for real change to occur (Bossidy and Charan 2002).

STEP 2: PREPARE CHANGE AGENTS FOR CHANGE RESISTANCE

Interestingly, Edmondson (2002) concluded that learning in organizations remains at the local level. Learning is driven by goals of individuals or small groups. Baldwin et al. (1997) observed that change and learning are inseparable. It appears, then, that there is a contradiction. Individuals are, on the one hand, labeled as resistant to change. On the other hand, these individuals are the learning drivers in organizations. Thus, it would seem that the assertions of Kotter (1995) about change resistance are supported by learning theory. An individual salesperson will more likely change behavior if he/she believes new ideas can be converted to positive results.

A change agent is a person who generates a change initiative by researching, planning, finding a champion and carefully seeking volunteers to be part of a change team. The level of support for change will be best understood if people playing the role of change agents are truly seen to support change and demonstrate an understanding of why salespeople will choose to support or resist a proposed change. Many of the problems encountered with implementing a sales force change program can be avoided if the sales organization has the full support and participation of sales personnel at all levels of the organization. Senge (1990) asserted that dialogue is a positive force in transferring learning to groups. Thus, intuitively, it would seem that dialogue would also be useful in transmitting understanding of change to groups. Kim (1993), Edmondson (2002), and Carlile (2002) each have grappled with knowledge transfer across organizational boundaries. Based on their work, Chen (1005) concluded that organizations must pay considerable attention to information and experience transfer.

Change agents must be responsible for identification of problems that might occur from the continued performance of addiction-like behaviors by salespeople. These change agents should be skilled at diagnosing the reasons for
the performance of addiction-like behaviors. They must be in a position to communicate how behavioral change will produce improved job performance. And, they must be skilled at working with individual salespeople experiencing problems with the proposed change. For change to be accepted by salespeople, it is critical to understand why salespeople might resist a particular change. Blanchard (1992) has identified seven human dynamics of change which we have adapted to the sales setting.

- Some salespeople feel awkward, ill-at-ease, and self-conscious about doing new things.
- Some salespeople initially focus on what they have to give up if they discontinue previous successful behaviors.
- Some salespeople feel alone even if everyone else is going through the same change.
- Some salespeople believe they can handle only incremental change without jeopardizing their personal and professional situations.
- Some salespeople are at high levels of readiness for change, some are not.
- Some salespeople are concerned they have too few resources to affect change, some are not.
- Some salespeople will revert to old (addictive) behaviors if the “perceived” pressures to change are removed.

A key to obtaining salesperson support for change is to make sure that all change agents are trained to understand such dynamics of sales force change resistance and the impact of addictive sales force behaviors on performance. Change agents must also specify remedies to overcome such resistance. Finally, they should also be able to recognize when problems are beyond their capabilities and have the ability to refer salespeople to proper counseling.

Rosenow (1983) asserts that immediate positive consequences are thought to influence behavior more strongly than delayed negative effects. Similarly, Stacy et al. (1990) found that positive expectancies are more readily accessible from memory than negative expectancies. It would seem that, in organizational change settings, the common wisdom of short term wins (e.g., Colletti and Chonko 1997) would be supported within an expectancy context.

Evidence in the alcohol literature supports the importance of negative expectancies impacting behavior (e.g., Adams and McNeil 1991). Lee et al. (1999) have suggested that positive expectancies might lead individuals to begin alcohol consumption whereas negative expectancies might limit the amount of alcohol consumed. Negative expectancies might also provide the motivation for problem drinkers to reduce or stop drinking (Jones and McMahon 1998). In general, the type of population studied has impacted the results of positive and negative expectancies. However, such findings do corroborate the importance of expectancies and their influence on behaviors and, consequently, suggest that research examine the impact of both positive and negative expectancies on sales force change behavior.

Effective change agents must operate from the assumption that resistance can lead to the sharing of constructive information about change. Change agents who welcome rather than resent resistance can discover ways to improve individual salesperson performance and improve the overall results of the change project. For example, while the information that follows may appear intuitive, recall that many change programs are judged as failures.

Effective change agents avoid over-reaction to change resistance once it is discovered. Indeed, with every change program will come change resistance at every step of the process. Effective change agents operate from the assumption that resistance can lead to the sharing of constructive information about change. Effective change agents welcome rather than resent resistance in their efforts to discover ways in which individual salespeople can improve their own performance and the overall performance of the company. In this context, viewing resistance to change as normal can stimulate change. Often, the best way to deal with resistance behavior is to encourage it – to seek expression of
differing opinions in order to reach common understanding. An open atmosphere of communication can actually lessen resistance to change even though dialogue can contain comments that sound negative and destructive.

Effective change agents know change cannot be perceived as an add-on effort. Rather, sustainable salesforce change becomes embedded in the culture of an organization (Fitch and Bell 1998). Further, change initiatives must have defined strategies and tactics that are anchored in core behaviors that salespeople can accept as effective. Thus, effective change agents must be able to accomplish such things as altering sales incentive systems to support change, obtaining rewards for change champions, and communicating up-to-date information on the status of change activities, indicating that the company views the change initiative as important. Effective change agents recognize that cynicism, resentment, and resistance are fueled by top-down change edicts. When salespeople feel they are part of the change, sales results can be enhanced. Salespeople become committed to organizations that treat them like partners. Salespeople want to feel trusted to take the initiative on things that are important to them. They also want to feel that their input is valued. When salespeople feel they must respond to edicts, the effects of change programs can be disastrous.

Effective change agents recognize that change provides emotional value both positive and negative. Emotional value can come in the form of growth, status, success, affirmation. Alternatively, emotional value can be negative. Emotional value is rooted in things that salespeople consider important – their jobs, their customers, their families. When change is mandated, and these important considerations are infringed upon (whether real or perceived), salespeople will resist change.

STEP 3: UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF SALESFORCE RESISTANCE AND ADDICTIVE BEHAVIORS

Learning about organizational change resistant behaviors is a key step in achieving “buy in” to change programs. An effective education program must be on-going and adaptive to account for new sales force members, new change resistant behaviors that might arise, old change resistant behaviors that occur with new sales representatives, old change resistant behaviors that resurface with old sales representatives, and successes that can be trumpeted and shared with all members of the sales force.

It is important that sales force members are motivated to change if they are to overcome addiction-like behavioral obstacles to improved performance. Salesperson motivation can be derived from their personal understanding of benefits obtained from stopping the addiction-like behavior or cutting back on the incidence of the such behavior. A key aspect of salesperson motivation lies in understanding: A) the process of change, B) sales force motivation to change, C) the level of the individual salesperson’s readiness for change, D) the roles change resisters can play, E) the types of resistance behavior that exist, and F) the role of imbalance in addictive behavior.

A. Understanding the Processes of Change

Individual salespeople will engage in solutions or consider a set of solutions to modify problematic thinking, behavioral deficiencies, problem behaviors, or undesirable results (Petrocelli 2002). The processes of change have been identified as the ways in which individuals attempt to make change with or without help and have been supported in the addiction literature (e.g., Di Clemente and Prochaska 1982; Prochaska and Norcross 1994; Prochaska et al. 1991). Ten processes of change have been identified as having an impact on change (Prochaska et al. (1988):
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1. Consciousness raising - information about the salesperson and the problem are explored and brought to concrete awareness.

2. Self-re-evaluation - the salesperson is re-evaluated with respect to the antecedents and potential solutions to the problem.

3. Self-liberation - the potential for a desirable outcome and the changes required to achieve that outcome are examined in terms of the salesperson’s abilities and commitments.

4. Counterconditioning - alternatives for change resistant behaviors are constructed and tested.

5. Stimulus control - stimuli that are associated with, or encountered before, the activation of the change resistant behaviors are avoided.

6. Reinforcement management - rewards from the salesperson or others become contingent upon changes required to meet goals.

7. Helping relationships - interpersonal relationships with people who care are further developed by building trust and being open.

8. Dramatic relief - affect is experienced and expressed regarding the problems and potential solutions.

9. Environmental re-evaluation - problems and potential solutions are considered with regard to how they influence the salesperson’s physical environment.

10. Social liberation - the opportunity for more desirable behaviors becomes increasingly available and valued by constituents.

These ten change processes must be understood in order to effectively manage change resistance. However, learning from such process experiences is not easy as many have observed (e.g., Carroll et al., 2002; Garvin 2000; Haunschild and Sullivan 2002, Edmondson 1996; Argyris and Schon 1996). Change agents must be aware of what is at stake for the salesperson in the process of change (Aptor 1999). Every salesperson, even those resisting a proposed change, has behavioral equilibrium of some kind. When confronted with change, a salesperson may contemplate various responses to change in seeking the “right” choice. Changing behavior requires “letting go” of previous behaviors, something which requires considerable motivation, much dialogue, and much introspection concerning competing commitments.

Change agents, when faced with diagnosing change processes relevant to a salesperson can engage in various approaches to learning. For example, change agents must be careful about employing single loop learning that is most characteristic of top down management change approaches. It involves change being mandated by demanding an altering of the behaviors of salespeople to meet organization norms, goals, values and assumptions.

Double-loop learning involves a change that is effected through a process of changing underlying values before new behaviors are implemented. Change agents employing double-loop learning engage in dialogue and questioning, possibly changing norms, goals, values and assumptions underlying what is being done. Isaacs (1993) introduced the idea of triple-loop learning in which the way one learns is studied. In an empirical assessment of triple loop learning, Haunschild and Sullivan (2002) examined learning in the airline industry, reporting that heterogeneity of cause of errors was more conducive to learning that homogeneity of cause of errors. In other words, acknowledging differences was important as it created a shift in the context of management’s point of view with the goal of helping managers learn, grow, and achieve desired results. Thus, it would seem that triple-loop learning holds some promise for change agents in their endeavors to manage and lead change under circumstances in which multiple change processes may be in play among salespeople.

B. Understanding Sales Force Motivation to Change

How people change has been a long-standing question. In addition to the addiction work of Prochaska et al. (1988) on change processes, Horn (1976) developed a model consisting of four stages of change related to behavior modification: (1) thinking about change, (2) deciding...
to take steps toward change, (3) actually making modifications in problematic behavior, and (4) attempting to maintain the new behavior. Prochaska and DiClemente (1982) proposed a five stage model for change shown in Table 3. According to this conceptualization, salespeople’s willingness to change would proceed through these identifiable stages.

The integration of process of change and stages of change has implications for the salesperson’s readiness for change (O’Hare 1996). In the precontemplation stage, salespeople are not even thinking about new behaviors and quitting the addictive behaviors. Indeed, they may not even be aware that they need to change their behavior. Nor is there any consideration of changing to some new behavior as prescribed by the organizational change initiative. Therefore, these salespeople are unlikely to change in the near future. At this stage, the salesperson remains inactive, uninterested and not open to any suggestions. Prochaska and DiClemente (1992) have determined that the change processes of consciousness raising, dramatic relief, and environmental re-evaluation are most effective for individuals attempting to make change at the precontemplation stage and progress to the contemplation stage. In the precontemplation stage, salespeople might have expectations concerning various sales force change programs and their previous experiences with change. Thus, they may rely on these past change experiences to make inferences about specific communications concerning the current change situation (Cantor and Mischal 1979). Additionally, the acceptability of change strategies in the precontemplation stages is likely to be strongly influenced by perceptions of success of previous change programs.

The contemplation stage is characterized by a salesperson seriously thinking about quitting the addiction-like behavior and changing to the new behavior. Here, salespeople have become aware of the pros and cons of the addiction-like behavior. Salespeople in the contemplation stage can be internally or externally motivated to move into this stage with brief interventions. At this stage, salespeople are not actively engaging in any activities required to affect change, but have expressed interest in trying something new. However, they can also remain completely satisfied with the status quo. The existing ambivalence can work in the organization’s favor if change agents can intervene to clarify conflicting thoughts and help salespeople move toward resolution (Miller and Rollnick 1991). Self-re-evaluation tends to be effective for individuals seeking change and transition from the contemplation stage to the preparation stage (Prochaska and DiClemente 1992).

In the preparation stage a salesperson has accepted some of the arguments in favor of behavioral change. Moreover, the salesperson has expressed a willingness to consider acting on them. Self-liberation tends to be effective for individuals willing to make the progression from the preparation stage to the action stage (Prochaska and DiClemente 1992).

In the action stage, salespeople have quit the addiction-like behavior for a short period of time and are in the process of changing to the recommended behaviors in accord with the company’s change initiative. Salespeople have only recently changed their behavior. Salespeople in the action stage attempt to adopt strategies to prevent a relapse into previous addiction-like behaviors. In this stage, salespeople may spend considerable time and effort learning how to avoid the previous behavioral tendencies (Barnes and Samet 1997). In progressing from action to maintenance, change processes of reinforcement management, helping relationships, counter-conditioning, and stimulus control tend to be effective (Prochaska and DiClemente 1992).

In the maintenance stage, salespeople have avoided the previous addiction-like behavior for a longer period of time than in the action stage and have been successful in implementing behavioral change. In fact, the new behaviors have been incorporated into new sales routines. The new behaviors are beginning to be institutionalized into the salesperson’s daily routine. Finally, as with all addictions, salespeople can
TABLE 3
A Plan of Salesperson Change in Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step in the Change Process</th>
<th>Description of Current State</th>
<th>Relevant Change Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Precontemplation (not considering change)</td>
<td>Salespeople with addictions to certain behaviors do not recognize this or are unconcerned with the consequences of the addiction-like behavior</td>
<td>* Provide a personally compelling reason for change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemplation (weighing the pros and cons of change; planning/commitment to change)</td>
<td>Salespeople give consideration to the possibility of change. Salespeople shift the balance in favor of change</td>
<td>* Recognize that generic information is not sufficient to reach this step * Provide convincing, personal and timely information * Avoid coercion or “advice” * Provide powerful information that is tied to the addictive behavior, that counters established expectancies, and has personal ramifications for one or more aspects of the salespersons life * Consider aspects of addictive behavior in a realistic manner * Modify expectancies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action (behavior modification)</td>
<td>Salespeople become sufficiently motivated and invested in a realistic goal</td>
<td>* Recognize the “triggers” of addiction-like behavior * Learn to steer urges early on * Overcome negative thoughts * Cope with pressures from others to engage in addictive behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance (sustaining the change)</td>
<td>The new behaviors’ become automatic</td>
<td>* Recognize that salespeople may go through change stages several times before change occurs * Allow for the possibility of slips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relapse</td>
<td>Salespeople are not perfect</td>
<td>* Recognize that old habits may die hard * Have tolerance for relapses * Do not consider relapse as failure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relapse to old behaviors. It is common for people to make several attempts to stop addiction-like behaviors before finally overcoming the addiction (Vaillant 1983). After a relapse, the salespeople can return to any of the previous stages and progress through them again. DiClemente (1991) observes that people considering changes of behavior will often focus on negative aspects of behavior. Thus, the challenge to change hinges on creating a behavioral perspective of the advantages and disadvantages of behavioral decision alternatives.

Sales force programs concerning change resistance must emphasize salesperson understanding of their own motivations. Change agents, at each stage of the change process, must realize the importance of expectancies. When a stimulus (e.g., a reason for change) is followed by an outcome (a reinforcer), that stimulus will eventually elicit a learned response, an expectancy regarding behavior. The stimulus-response learning process is a gradual one. Expectancies have stimulus characteristics which enable salespeople to control their behaviors.

As with substance abuse, recovering behavioral addicts can experience strong motivations to relapse – to return to the change resistant behavior. The motivations may peak in frequency
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and intensity, but, ultimately, will decline, with purpose, support and reward. Change agents must understand that such motivations are normal. The response of the individual salesperson and change agent is crucial. The existence of motivations to relapse is not a sign of poor motivation to change. They are a sign of a strong desire to engage in certain behaviors. Initiating change requires breaking through the cocoon of defensive beliefs and protective behaviors. The change agent must strive to make difficult topics discussable. Thus, learning behaviors must be crafted in such a way as to encourage salesperson curiosity and inquiry. To overcome salesperson change resistance, change agents must seek ways to employ the expectancy process - to provide new stimuli that lead to desired change behaviors while striving to help formerly resistant salespeople unlearn undesirable stimulus-response patterns.

For change resistant salespeople to consider change, the following strategies have been proffered to support productive reasoning about the change process (Argyris and Comfort 1994):

1. Produce directly observable data concerning salesperson reasoning and action
2. Encourage salespeople to examine inconsistencies and gaps in reasoning that underlie their actions
3. Discuss, agree on, and make explicit rules that must be inside the salesperson’s head if the salesperson is to maintain that a connection exists between thought and action
4. View resistance, bewilderment, or frustration as directly observable data that can be used to examine the validity of what is being learned
5. Create opportunities to craft actions that reduce counterproductive consequences

To summarize, research has shown that different processes of change are associated with various stages of change (e.g., Di Clemente et al. 1991). Two concepts critical to understanding why salespeople decide to change behavior are addressed by the question: “Within what motivational context do change resistant salespeople become ready for change?” Readiness for change is discussed next.

C. Readiness for Change, Motivation and Change Resistance

Motivational readiness for change differs among change resisters (Di Clemente and Hughes 1990). Motivation for change is both behavioral and goal specific, meaning that what motivates change will vary by the individual salesperson. Salespeople may decide to change behavior when they learn to view the positive consequences of change as outweighing the negative ones (Cox and Klinger 1988). However, an important determinant of the balance of positive and negative consequences is the degree of satisfaction the salesperson derives from other work and life areas (Cox and Blount 2000). Thus, a salesperson can be motivated to change if he/she anticipates finding satisfaction in behavioral alternatives. It follows that salesperson readiness for change should be associated with motivation - those salespeople who feel more strongly motivated to pursuits with expected positive outcomes being more ready to change.

Readiness for change is an individual level construct that requires consideration of the organizational context. Eby et al. (2000) asserted that individuals have preconceived notions about the extent to which an organization is ready for change. Similarly to Kotter (1995), they asserted that an employee’s perception of readiness for change is an assessment of the organization’s ability to make desired changes successfully. Creating a readiness for change among salespeople requires proactive attempts on the part of change agents to influence beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors of salespeople. Thus, the social aspects of change are critical as salespeople look to one another and to other colleagues for insights about the meaning of events and circumstances facing the sales organization (Armenakis et al. 1993).

With reference to the addiction literature, evidence suggests that substance abusers do respond to incentives and modify their behaviors.
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However, incentives do not often result in long-term change. Curry et al. (1990) demonstrated that intrinsic motivations appear to produce better long-term outcomes than extrinsic motivations. Further, there is evidence that distinguishes between the effects of imposed vs. intentional change (DiClemente and Scott 1997). Imposed change is often temporary as people seek to avoid consequences or punishment. If imposed change does not trigger internal or intentional motivation to change, maintenance of change is compromised. Thus, intentional change should be the goal for those seeking stimulus-response driven change in addiction-like behavior.

Research that has investigated sources of motivation for change has often compared intrinsic and extrinsic sources (Deci and Ryan 1987). In general, internal motivation has been associated with greater long-term change than external motivation (Ryan et al. 1995; Deci and Ryan 1985). Offering people extrinsic rewards, such as financial incentives has proven effective as an intervention to enhance behavioral change (e.g., Curry et al. 1991). However, some interventions employing intrinsic motivators have been found to be more successful than standard interventions with the offer of financial incentives (e.g., Higgins and Budney 1993; Stitzer et al. 1993).

Finally, a distinction must be made between readiness for change and readiness for treatment. Receptivity and readiness are not synonymous (DiClemente and Hughes 1990). A salesperson’s readiness for change may be, as with substance addicts, a more important predictor of behavioral change than receptivity or readiness for treatment. Treatment, in addiction behavior, is a time-limited event that interacts with larger change processes but may also be imposed. The process of creating a readiness for behavioral change as a precursor to actual behavioral change is more extensive than any single treatment (DiClemente and Scott 1997). One of the more powerful elements of dealing with addiction-like behaviors lies in the individual salesperson learning that s/he has the power of choice (Glasser 1998). It has been shown that when individuals are able to understand and accept internal locus of control, total behavior, organized behaviors, and wants and needs, their chances for changing behavior are much greater (Howatt 2003).

Factors related to readiness for change such as ambivalence should be viewed in light of the salesperson’s interaction with his/her situation (Miller 1985). Readiness for change has been found to be a function of many factors (e.g., Hewes and Janikowski 1998). Cunningham et al. (1997), for example, reported that readiness for change must be viewed as the relative balance between the costs and benefits of undertaking any behavior. Salespeople who have no intention of changing behavior rate the costs of changing higher than the benefits. People contemplating change or taking action to change rate the benefits of change as greater than the costs of the change.

Motivation to change is not a personality trait (Chychula and Sciamanna 2002). Motivation is a state of readiness or willingness to change. It may fluctuate over time or from one situation to the next. Indeed, those trying to influence change also influence the motivation of salespeople toward change (Miller and Rollnick 1991). Different variables, such as choice of goals, can affect motivation to change. When goals are explicit, proximal, and viewed as achievable, salespeople will strive to achieve them (Bandura 1977). Further, salespeople are likely to comply with suggestions if they perceive that they have had some part in selecting them (Chychula and Sciamanna 2002).

Prochaska’s and DiClemente’s (1983) stages of change model has been asserted to be of value in exploring how people make decisions concerning predictive testing and also in the general context of counseling (Houlihan 1999). The model describes the processes underlying intentional change in which individuals move from being unaware or unwilling to do anything about a behavior (pre-contemplation) to sustaining or maintaining change over time (maintenance). Applications of this model in cases of substance addiction have been equivo-
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pal (e.g., Houlihan 1999), as self-changers rarely negotiate change in an orderly fashion (Prochaska and DiClemente 1992). However, the model has value as a diagnostic tool and a tool for building effective communication and, therefore, effective decision making. The key to employing the stages of change model is to ascertain the salesperson’s readiness for change and then tailor change strategies accordingly.

D. Understanding the Roles Change Resisters Can Play

One of the primary reasons change efforts fail is that employees resist them (Maurer 1997). As a part of change education, change agents must understand the roles which change resisters can play. A key in this endeavor is discovering change resistant motivations that might be the result of competing commitments. Salespeople can be very adept at hiding their commitments. Therefore, a portion of the training for change agents should be devoted to learning how to ask questions that lead to the discovery of competing commitments.

Salespeople seemingly addicted to other behavioral commitments often complain about change. People complain about the things they care about, and loudly about the things they hold to be most important. Finding the roots of these complaints concerns questions about what salespeople would like to see changed. Examination of these change suggestions can reveal information about the competing commitments of the salesperson. Salesperson commitments, priorities, and past results must also be assessed in an effort to reach agreement that a salesperson may be, in part, responsible for resisting change. The key is to convince the salesperson that his/her behavior is affecting others and to gain understanding of the logic of the competing commitments. Finally, salespeople can be challenged to consider the consequences of continuing to engage in their addiction-like behaviors—their competing commitments. For example, in our earlier salesperson situation, the salesperson might evince a fear of teamwork because of a concern that his/her ideas will be rejected. Based on this information, salespeople are then asked about outcomes being prevented by their change resistant behavior. The answer lies in a core belief that underlies the salesperson’s resistance. Salespeople can play one of the following four change resistance roles:

The Dissidents: These salespeople exhibit overt and conscious resistance behaviors. They believe their protests against change make a positive contribution. They feel they have been “called” to point out the pitfalls of change. They feel they are the preservers of tradition. Dissident behavior is usually visible and dissidents are generally open to discussing their viewpoints.

The Clueless: Such salespeople engage in covert and unconscious resistance behaviors. They do not necessarily know that their behaviors are undermining change efforts. They may be clueless concerning their missing of goals and of the implications of their behavior. Generally speaking, their behaviors go undetected as higher profile projects hide them. When their lack of adaptation to change is discovered, they are as surprised as others. And, they are as disappointed in their lack of willingness to change.

The Unconscious: These salespeople engage in overt and unconscious resistance behaviors. Unconscious salespeople are so accustomed to behaving in certain ways that they appear unable to change. They may nod in agreement that change is needed, but they have neither the desire nor ability to change. If they show any signs of change, they will gradually gravitate back to the way things were. They do not regard the lack of change as change resistance. Rather, they are simply avoiding change until they are reminded that change is something they must do.

The Terrorist: These salespeople engage in covert and conscious resistance behaviors. Terrorists will undermine change while giving the appearance of supporting it. Some will verbally support a change and simply hope that it goes away. Their terrorist activities are limited to public relations campaigns. Other terrorists

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have more sinister motivations and may even resort to sabotage of the change initiative for their own personal gain. In strongly competitive environments, sabotage is a possibility.

A fifth role can be described as the Evangelist. The Evangelist’s behaviors are similar to those of the dissidents in that they are overt and conscious, but favor the proposed change initiative. Surprisingly, Evangelists can even be a source of change resistance. Salespeople who are always in favor of the company line, who always endorse company change initiatives without giving the appearance of thinking, can be viewed negatively by their colleagues. Change requires leadership and leaders require objectivity, not the kind of agreement that is forthcoming from evangelists.

E. Diagnosing Types of Resistant Behavior

Knowledge of how change resistance roles are enacted helps change agents deal with change issues. Change resistance involves opposition to or withholding of support for change ideas and plans. O’Connor (1993) identified two dimensions of resistant behaviors - covert and overt and unconscious and conscious. Covert change resistance is that which is concealed or undefined. Such resistance may go undetected for long periods of time as salespeople talk the walk but do not walk the talk. Overt resistance, on the other hand, manifests itself in the open expression of viewpoints and the provision of rationale for disagreement. Unconscious resistance is such that salespeople may not even recognize that their behavior undermines change. Unconsciously motivated actions may be based on the wrong information, poor training, or deeply ingrained habits. Conscious resistance, on the other hand, requires taking a resistance stance after considering change. These forms of resistance may also be based on misinformation or they may be self-serving. Ignoring them only increases resistance. Even when resistant sales representatives say “no” to change, resistance activity can have value. Conscious resistance may be based on sound reasoning and logic. Unconscious salesperson actions, either covert or overt, require that change agents help salespeople become aware of what they are doing and why. An unconscious reaction might come in the form of “this, too, shall pass.” Salespeople may stoically and unconsciously resist change by having become addicted to status quo behaviors. If they keep their feelings to themselves, their behavior is covert. However, if they talk to other salespeople, particularly newer ones, their “just wait, this will blow over like all the other change programs” approach takes on more overt and conscious characteristics.

Other change resistant reactions might include the following:

- “This company does not care what we think.” Unfortunately, there is likely a bit of truth in such statements as organizations can be uncaring and unfeeling. To the degree that this is true, change resistance is rooted in the way the organization operates, not with salespeople.
- “What’s in it for me?” Salespeople will put their efforts into behaviors they view as worthy change. Again, if salespeople see no benefit from change, the roots of change resistance lie in the organization.
- “Hey, Sally, have you heard….?” When salespeople are put in a position in which they require knowledge they do not have they can resort to concoctions of what they believe the truth is. Here, again, it is the organization’s responsibility to provide salespeople with the necessary information to affect positive change.
- “They do not walk the talk, why should we?” Top management and supervisory actions must be viewed by salespeople as consistent with and supportive of proposed changes. If management reverts to the status quo, the roots of change resistance are, once again, in the way the organization operates.

Salespeople who fall into this unconscious behavioral category may not fully understand the goals of the proposed change. Alternatively, they may not fully understand the benefits that the change will bring to the sales organization.
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Moreover, they may lack understanding of how their actions can contribute to the organization’s goals and their personal goals. Unconscious behavior requires an education-based approach. This applies to the clueless and the unconscious. As these salespeople become conscious of what they are doing, then discovery as to whether or not they really are supportive of change can proceed.

Conscious behavior, whether overt or covert, must be dealt with through debate (O’Connor 1993). Conscious change resistant behavior may result from salespeople not believing that there is a serious need for change. It may also be the result of salespeople not being in agreement with the goals of change. Alternatively, salespeople may not believe that the goals of change are attainable or they lack confidence in those that are managing the change process.

F. Understanding the Role of Imbalance and Addictive Behavior

One emphasis in learning about resistance to change should be on addiction avoidance. Tomer (2001) proposes a framework for addiction avoidance that focuses on reducing imbalances in five areas:

- **Personal Capital**: The human capacity that derives from personal qualities (Tomer 1996). When salesperson imbalance reaches a threshold and the salesperson finds addictive behaviors good, a sense of balance is restored (Michaels 1988). A salesperson’s personal capital can be enhanced by self-improvement activities, reading, listening to/viewing tapes, attending seminars. Therefore, it seems appropriate that educational materials on change can improve a salesperson’s personal capital related to change.

- **Social Capital**: The human capacity embodied in a salesperson’s relationships with others such as family, civic communities, and the larger society. Social capital enables a salesperson to do more than he/she is capable by acting individually. If salespeople feel part of a team (i.e., they have strong social capital), or if they feel they have ownership in company performance, their imbalances are less likely to be problematic. When social capital is weak, imbalances are likely to be more pronounced and addictive behaviors more readily considered as balance restorers.

- **Consumption Capital**: The development of a capacity for and a preference for a behavior. Accumulating consumption capital implies the development of a capacity to appreciate behaviors as good. Steps in becoming addicted to a behavior include: a) becoming oriented to a behavior, b) learning about the behavior, c) learning when to perform the behavior, d) learning to seek out others who perform the behavior, and e) learning how the behavior affects the salesperson’s mental state. Through this process, salespeople can become addicted to behaviors as they derive “value” from performing the behaviors.

- **Society and Community**: Influencers include leaders, peer groups, organizations, the media and so forth. If sociocultural influencers encourage such things as teamwork, feelings that all people have worth, a desire to belong, salespeople are less likely to engage in addictive behavior.

- **Current Life Situation**: Salespeople exhibit differential levels of control over their lives and the incidence of role transitions, personal crises, or social stressors in their lives. To the extent that life situations are positive, salespeople will be less likely to engage in addictive behaviors.

It is a challenge to generalize about addictive behavior as there are many addictive behavioral patterns that correspond to different types of addictions (Tomer 2001). However, if we consider what kind of people avoid becoming addicted, in general, it is people who can experience feelings of joy, competence and meaningfulness while participating in life’s activities (Peele 1985). Alternatively, people who become addicts are those with an imbalance that prevents them from attaining real satisfactions.
and rewards from life’s activities. The inability to attain these feelings naturally leads to temptation to pursue these feelings in other ways.

The five factors related to addiction avoidance mentioned above represent the salesperson’s degree of imbalance. Personal capital is the most important factor regarding change, the other factors tending to moderate the imbalance. Salespeople weigh expected benefits against the expected costs of change resistant behavior in making behavioral choices. If the salesperson’s addiction-like behavior is strong, he/she is not likely to consider conflicting and relevant information. Further, the salesperson’s mental bookkeeping is likely to overlook significant costs associated with continuance of the addiction-like behavior.

As change occurs, salespeople who overcome their resistance to change are now coping with problems previously dealt with through their addiction-like behavior. Much of their work will emphasize learning new behaviors to cope with problems. Learning must emphasize the benefits and costs associated with all behaviors including the addictive behaviors. A critical stage in this understanding is the identification of high risk factors (e.g., situations, persons, places, moods, conflicts) that lead to the addiction-like behavior. Emphasis must be placed on the benefits derived from new coping behaviors. Also, some focus should be given to the enjoyment experienced from performing new behaviors, relationships that can be fostered with other former addicts, and the sense of confidence being experienced by the former addict. All of this is designed to create a barrier between the individual salesperson and the addictive behavior with the goal of interrupting an unconscious behavioral pattern.

**STEP 4: PROVIDE PROACTIVE SALESFORCE ASSISTANCE**

The fourth step in the process depicted in Figure 2 is the provision of proactive sales force assistance. Just as with substance abuse programs, many sales organizations are likely to be unsure whether they should provide assistance to salespeople coping with change resistant addictions. Terminating change resistant salespeople may seem to be a cost-effective means of coping. However, in most cases it probably makes better sense to help salespeople overcome tendencies to engage in addiction-like behaviors. A proactive change-focused sales force assistance program is designed to assist salespeople whose job performance is negatively affected by addiction-like behavior. Such a program can reduce the incidence of addictive behaviors and improve sales force morale, compensation, work ethics and contribution to the overall productivity of the organization.

Like substance abuse programs, such assistance must be kept confidential. Salespeople must believe that their performance and their relationships will not be jeopardized through participation in such a program. Salespeople must also understand that behavioral change, if needed, is expected. A change abuse program must have top management support and must avoid the “quick fix” mentality.

Addiction treatments are, by and large, designed to produce lasting reductions in symptoms following the need of treatment. If change agents believe that some combination of coaching, socially oriented programs, support systems, and changes in organizational policies and procedures are expected to affect change in the root cause of addiction-like behavior, then the removal of causal factors would provide lasting benefits. However, if those interventions only reduce the number and severity of symptoms while improving job performance as long as the salesperson participates in the intervention, then the treatment of addiction-like behavior is not appropriate (McLellan et al. 1996).

In other words, a continuing approach is required for making behavioral change attractive to salespeople. If interventions are ongoing and require salespeople to partner with others in the firm, pertinent aspects of the addiction-like behavior can be managed. Salespeople will likely not comply with interventions that have
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negative side-effects, so care must be taken by change agents to ensure that salespeople will benefit from change and that the change will not be too painststaking, too time-consuming, or too intrusive in the other aspects of the salesperson’s life. A continuing approach requires monitoring and an integration of the behavioral changes into the broader spectrum of the organization’s activities. Continual monitoring, early detection of relapse, and referral to coaching are all critical activities. When combined with other aspects of the change resistance management program, change assessment activity can be an effective deterrent to addictive behaviors and can also help identify salespeople who might need additional help.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In this paper, we present a four-step program for overcoming change resistance in a sales organization. This program includes the following steps: 1) creating a program to manage change resistance, 2) preparing change agents for change resistance, 3) understanding the nature of sales force resistance and addictive behaviors, and 4) providing proactive sales force assistance.

An important contribution of expectancies lies in their ability to predict changes in behavior. For example, again referring to the alcohol literature, expectancies relating to enhanced or impeded social behavior predicted the transition of adolescents from non-problem to problem drinking during the next twelve months (Christiansen et al. 1989). Based on this work, a host of research questions can be posited related to organizational characteristics and sales force perceptions of changes in those characteristics. For example, do changes in sales force perceptions of organizational readiness for change impact their behavior in any way?

Expectancy research typically includes a measure of endorsement (agree/disagree) or the perceived likelihood (likely/unlikely) of experiencing certain outcomes. In the alcohol literature, it has been suggested that the subjective evaluation of expected outcomes might be important determinant of behavior (Fromme et al. 1993). Likelihood and endorsement estimates, when multiplied together, form a utility estimate (e.g., Wall, et al. 1998). Use of such estimates has yielded mixed findings in the alcohol literature (Stacy et al. 1990). However, this does not preclude examination in a change management format.

Brown (1985) found that higher positive alcohol outcome expectancies predicted a decreased likelihood of year-long abstinence and treatment compliance. Alcohol expectancies also predicted the length of sobriety among members of Alcoholics Anonymous (Rather and Sherman 1989). Thus, change research should focus on desired outcomes of change initiatives and the expectancies associated with those outcomes among sales force members. Research might include examination of the impact of change history and support history on this relationship (e.g., Chonko et al. 2002).

Just as educational and motivational considerations play an important role in substance abuse, they also play a key role in dealing with addiction-like behavior. Change resisters vary in what motivates them and in what stage of change they are in. Extrinsic motivation produces short-term behavioral change. The endurance of extrinsically motivated behavioral change is rooted in how quickly the value of the extrinsic motivator erodes. Change agents must strive to understand the most effective sales force motivational influences for the strongest change resisters and to understand the support mechanisms required for sustained change behavior. Change is to be expected and so is resistance to change. A sales organization with proactive change initiative policies will be better positioned to affect successful change. Treating sales force resistance to change from an addiction perspective provides a tested blueprint for approaching the change conundrum.

Creating readiness for change involves proactive attempts by change agents to influence the beliefs, attitudes, and intentions and behavior of salespeople (Jansen 2000). Salespeople are social in that they will look to one another for
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cues about the meaning of events and circumstances facing the organization (Armenakis et al. 1993). Each salesperson is not an empty slate. They have experiences, although their experiences might be limited, somewhat, through their behavioral choices. These experiences influence further choices leading to habits and addictive behaviors. The habits acquired by a young salesperson can continue to influence behavior even if the sales environment changes rapidly. What salespeople may be lacking is a systems perspective (Senge 1990). Without the “big picture” to clarify organizational strategies, salespeople are likely lacking in the knowledge that gives them the ability to view change in the most favorable light.

An implication of applying addiction concepts to change is that researchers must expand viewpoints beyond top-down sales organizational change models (Piderit 2000) in which salespeople are left to their own devices and judgments about the benefits of change. There are merits to organization programs like General Electric’s work-out in which ideas come from everyone. Work-out assumes that people who work on the front lines know their jobs best. Managers provide direction, resources and support, but front-line people are empowered as a means of motivating them to excellence. Listening is a critical aspect of the manager’s job.

Increasingly, change processes are being managed in emergent and democratic ways (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1997). Finding answers to questions of how salespeople’s responses to change evolve over time and how such shifts are related to performance with which the change is implemented is critical. Marshak (2004) has touched upon this notion of evolving change in his work on morphing. The need for continuous change is now confronting some sales organizations. This represents a departure from transformational change which is episodic in nature. Morphing implies a continuous change in products, services, resources, capabilities, and ways of organizing as firms seek to maintain competitive advantage (Rindova and Kotha 2001). It implies stages of transformation over longer periods of time and calls for examination of the relevance of triple loop learning and change.

Addiction theory can help change agents navigate, over time, resistance to change by providing insights into ways behaviors become addiction-like, the assumptions that underline addiction-like behaviors, and the rationale for defense of such behaviors. Change agents must learn to teach behaviorally addictive salespeople how their change resistance actions affect their own productivity as well as the productivity of the sales organization. Dialogue that involves features such as suspending assumptions allows for more genuine team thought effort (Senge 1990). Teams have often been used to generate new ideas and innovate through dialogue (e.g., Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). Thus, it would appear that the concept of dialogue would have some merit in the case of sales force change programs.

Change agents must also be adept at understanding addiction-like behavior so that they can show how behavioral change can affect the salesperson’s capacity to meet future change and opportunities. Ideally, change agents, as a result of their work with behaviorally addicted salespeople, can integrate their learning into the sales strategic plan and the culture of the sales organization for long-term developmental purposes. Finally, change agents can help behaviorally addicted salespeople to view themselves as partners (as opposed to resisters) and encourage their input.

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