CHAPTER 21: ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE AND RESISTANCE: AN IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE

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Chapter in: Courpasson, D. and Vallas, S. (Eds.) (2016)
The SAGE Handbook of Resistance. SAGE: London.

Introduction

A classic term in popular and scholarly literature on change management is 'resistance to change'. It understands resistance in terms of opposition to managerial strategies for organizational change. Since change is generally viewed as reasonable and desirable within this literature, resistance to change promulgates the image of employees digging in their heels, refusing to offer support, and hindering a natural and necessary course of events (e.g., Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979). More recently, some change management scholars have embraced a more positive framing of resistance by viewing it as an opportunity to generate 'conversations' about change by involving employees, although ultimately with the aim of securing support for change (e.g., Ford, Ford & D'Amelio 2008). Resistance according to this view becomes instrumental to the strategies pursued by management. Critical scholars challenge both these views of resistance by rejecting a managerialist agenda. Instead, they are sceptical of managerially imposed change and conceptualize resistance as legitimate attempts by employees to repudiate initiatives that may benefit organizational interests, but which will impact negatively on their interests and working conditions (e.g., Thompson & Ackroyd, 1995).

In this chapter, we use a discursive approach to identity to interrogate these three approaches to resistance, and identify the different identities constructed in the different literatures – the 'change agent', the 'change recipient', and the 'resistant subject'. Whether framing them in positive or negative terms, these different literatures tend to reify identities by categorizing individuals as either advocates or adversaries of change. We suggest that instead of fixed categories, identities are situationally constructed: organizational actors struggle to establish, maintain or disrupt particular notions of who they are and who others are in the process of negotiating organizational change and resistance. In this way, change, resistance and identity are intricately and dynamically connected. By reviewing how popular and critical literatures of change conceptualize resistance and identity, this chapter provides new insights to inform, and perhaps unsettle, received wisdom regarding resistance. Specifically, we aim to show how through the discursive enactment of identities in

relation to change and resistance, organizational actors author different versions of self and other.

The chapter is organized as follows. We start by introducing the concept of identity as discursively constructed. We then examine the literature on organizational change and identify three distinct ways in which resistance has been conceptualized in this literature. We then discuss the specific identities that are typically constructed in and by the different literatures. We critique the reified nature of these identities, analyzing how each of these literatures engages in forms of discourse that abstracts, objectifies and fixes actors' identities, classifying them in terms of, for instance, active champions, passive recipients, poor victims, smart resistors, etc. Using a short vignette of a change workshop we show how in discursive struggles over organizational change and resistance, organizational actors construct reified versions of change resistors, change agents and change recipients through self-other talk. We also show how this reification of identities obscures a more fluid process insofar as participants switch from one type of self-other talk to another during discussions, resulting in actors 'becoming' – or laying variable claims to 'being' – resistant and compliant at different points in time. Finally, we discuss some of the analytical, practical and ethical implications of our analysis as well as a few limitations, in an attempt to offer directions for future research and practice.

The Discursive Construction of Identities

Identity refers to "subjective meanings and experience, to our ongoing efforts to address the twin questions, 'Who am I?' and – by implication – 'how should I act?'" (Alvesson et al., 2008: 6). It can be understood as a reflexively ordered narrative that is "stimulated by social interaction and ordered by institutionalized patterns of being and knowing" (Thomas, 2009: 168-9). Viewing identity in this way means eschewing the suggestion that it is an objective fact, a deeper essence, or the sum total of an individual's character traits. Instead, identities are conceived of as discursive constructions that are articulated, resisted, embraced, maintained and modified on an on-going basis. Such a perspective frames identity as constituted through the ways in which people present

their 'selves' in talking about and presenting themselves in relation to others (Jenkins, 2004), as well as how these others audit, applaud or reject those selves (e.g., Czarniawska, 1997). Individuals position themselves in relation to particular audiences (Garcia & Hardy, 2007) as identities are constructed 'in between' the communicator(s) and their audience(s). There is a "dynamic interplay between internal strivings and external prescriptions, between self-presentation and labeling by others, between achievement and ascription and between regulation and resistance" (Ybema et al., 2009: 301).

Everyday discourse of 'self' and 'other' or 'self-other talk' (Ybema et al. 2009) is one domain where we see this dynamic interplay 'in action'. The enactment of identities involves the discursive articulation of sameness and otherness. We (and others) understand who we are by signifying who we are not. The social construction of identity is thus a matter of establishing, preserving, challenging and disrupting a sense of similarity and difference which imposes seemingly arbitrary boundaries to create and define 'identity' through 'alterity' (Ybema et al., 2009). Whether in wider socio-cultural scripts and normative prescriptions or actors' own definitions of themselves and others, such distinctions are usually accomplished through a process whereby 'self' is positioned against 'other' often in crude categorical alternatives – good versus bad, rational versus emotional, willing versus unwilling, etc. Far from being neutral or benign, such discursive positioning is invariably coloured by moral judgments, emotional involvement, and political or economic interests. It implicates social manoeuvring and power games, and serves to establish, legitimate or challenge the prevailing relationships of power and status (e.g., Ybema & Byun, 2011).

This approach to identity highlights the role of individual agency, interactional dynamics and organizational politics, as well as emphasizing how particular socio-historical settings and wider discourses script, categorize and shape people's identity constructions. It also emphasises how identity constructions, in turn, shape those settings, since "selves and sociality are mutually implicated and mutually co-constructed" (Ybema et al., 2009: 307). Individuals present their selves

to – and in – a particular context, conforming to or deviating from particular prescriptions in processes of negotiation between self and others, and between 'inner' desires and strivings and an 'outside' world. So, for example, professional and organizational scripts for appropriate or desirable behaviour, attributes, and aesthetics provide disciplinary persuasions as to how individuals can act 'normal', play 'the part' or express 'appropriate' opinions, to which individuals may or may not conform.

The concept of discourse is particularly important in understanding these processes of identity construction. It helps to explain the socio-historical context in which identities are constructed, the resources available in crafting identities, as well as the limits that individuals face in constructing self and other. We use the term discourse to refer to interrelated sets of practices and texts that "systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972: 49). Discourses constitute the social world by bringing certain phenomena into being (Parker, 1992), including objects of knowledge, categories of social subjects, forms of self, social relationships, and conceptual frameworks (Fairclough, 1992). Insofar as discourses are "historically and culturally variable ways of specifying knowledge and truth" (Meriläinen, Tienari, Thomas and Davies 2004: 544), they do not merely identify pre-existing objects, they help to constitute them. A discursive approach to identity also brings power relations into view. Power lies at the heart of forming, sustaining and constraining understandings of who we are and who we might be (McNay, 2000), with different discourses offering possibilities for sustaining identities, as well as regulating them (Kondo 1990). Discourses constrain the construction of identities through their normalizing effects on the individual, marking out the range of possibilities for sustainable and legitimate selves. However, discourses can never fully constrain or determine identities: there is always indeterminacy within any individual discourse and individuals also operate within multiple discursive fields where different discursive elements come into play. Agency and discourse thus intersect as individuals are subjectively motivated to reproduce and transform the power relations that underpin the way in which they are categorized and constituted.

In sum, individuals are both the site and subjects of discursive struggles around their identity (Beech, & Johnson, 2005). A discursive approach emphasises the processual nature of identity formation, recognising that identities are actively negotiated, reproduced and changed on an on-going basis, as medium and outcome of power relations (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996; Thomas & Linstead, 2002).

Identity, Change and Resistance

In this section, we present three views of resistance that feature in different literatures. First, we discuss what might be described as the 'traditional' approach to organizational change, which tends to demonize resistance as a result of its unequivocal managerialist orientation. Second, we introduce a somewhat different view of resistance that retains a managerialist approach, but sees resistance in a more positive light. Finally, we discuss critical approaches to change and resistance. Within each approach, we use our conceptualization of identity to reflect on how it constructs and positions two distinct, fixed identities – the change agent and the change recipient.

Promoting Change; Demonizing Resistance

The literature on managing organizational change is extensive and diverse, starting with the Organization Development approach (e.g., Cummings & Worley, 1997; French & Bell, 1990) through to more processual and political approaches (e.g., Pettigrew, 1987; Quinn, 1980). The bulk of this literature explicitly acknowledges that resistance to change is likely to arise and managers interested in bringing about organizational change should therefore give careful thought as to how to avoid or defeat it. This work takes a clearly managerialist view: change is a 'must' for organizations. Competitive pressures, global trends, new technologies, and unexpected events all require organizations to engage in change initiatives. Resistance from employees cannot therefore be allowed to interfere with organizations' attempts at renewal. Resistance is thus conceptualized in "negative terms, as a sign of failure … or as a problem to be eliminated or minimized" (Giangreco & Peccei, 2005: 1816).

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The causes of resistance are primarily attributed to the shortcomings of employees, such as self-interest, a lack of tolerance for change, cynicism or fear i.e., inappropriate attitudes and behaviours on the part of employees gives rise to resistance which, in turn, impedes the change initiative (Piderit, 2000). Occasionally, managers are criticized for failing to communicate the advantages of change adequately to their employees but, most of the time, it is their subordinates who bear the blame for causing resistance (Dent & Goldberg, 1999). Solutions therefore revolve around improved communication, education, and participation (Furst & Cable, 2008; Giangreco & Peccei, 2005). However, if employees still fail to respond in a satisfactory manner – i.e., by ceasing to resist – managers are justified in using more coercive methods to force through the change. The aim is to stamp out resistance and 'correct' those intransigent individuals who engage in it (Thomas & Hardy, 2011) because it is a dysfunctional response of subordinates against change (Dent and Goldberg, 1999). Accordingly, this literature problematizes and demonizes resistance by framing it as negative and harmful to organizations; a pathology that obstructs change attempts, and which needs to be eradicated (see Piderit 2000; Sonenshein, 2010; Thomas and Hardy, 2011; Hon, Bloom & Crant, 2011).

The work that demonizes resistance constructs the identities of change agent and change recipient in a fixed and predetermined way. It privileges the change agent – the identity assumed to be responsible for and committed to the change in question. The change agent has sole responsibility for identifying the need for change, creating a vision of the change that is to come, specifying desired outcomes, and then making it all happen. Change agents are 'change strategists' (Kanter, Stein & Jick, 1992) – an identity that is accessible usually only to senior managers and consultants whose authority, status and expertise make them suitably responsible for, and capable of, formulating and leading the change project. As the need for change is seen as self-evident, the change agent's position, plans and policies automatically gain significance as being rational and legitimate.

Change agents are clearly distinct from change recipients, on whom the change is to be

inflicted. If the change agent is 'self' then the change recipient is 'other', with an equally fixed identity. Cast as responsible for adopting or adapting to change (Ford et al., 2008), their acquiescent, if not enthusiastic reception is integral to successful outcomes. Those who question the taken-for-granted rationality of change are viewed as problems that need to be 'managed' by the change agent as part of the change process. To account for such an unwarranted, irrational and detrimental response to change efforts, this literature often assumes change recipients suffer from fears and anxieties, psychologizing resistance as an inevitable and natural reaction and/or pathologizing it as irrational and unnatural. Resistance is triggered because human beings – change agents not included – have resistant personalities (van Dam et al., 2008). They display innate conservatism and fears of the unknown, or possess a disloyal character that aims at preserving the status quo to meet personal ends. This literature thus "places the change agent on the side of the angels, and the people being changed as mulish and obstinate, resisting innovations that have proved successful elsewhere" (Dobosz-Bourne & Jankowicz 2006: 2030).

This type of self-other talk sets change agents apart from change recipients in terms of supporters versus opponents of change. In its theorization of resistance to change, it implicitly invokes a series of binary oppositions – rational and determined versus fearful and insecure; pursuing offensive, forward-looking strategies versus defensive, backward-looking strategies; being dedicated to a common cause versus cynically pursuing private interests; and, ultimately, heroically conquering resistance versus stubbornly holding on to the status quo. Empirical studies of organizational change show that self-proclaimed champions of change frequently adopt such self-serving and other-diminishing identity talk (e.g., Symon 2005). It allows change agents to avoid blame for any delays or failures in the change process by shifting it on to others. Labelling a response to change as 'resistance' frames any act as obstructive and the actor in question as obstructionist, disqualifying the 'other' and, implicitly, exonerating the 'self'. The speaker's own intention and dedication to bring about change need not be questioned.

Psychologizing the 'other' by assuming change recipients suffer from fears and

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conservatism has the additional advantage of reframing substantive concerns and critique as mental deficiencies, releasing 'change agents' from entering into conversation or negotiation with so-called change recipients because the problem is psychological, not substantive. It is not the change plan, but the change recipients' attitudes that need changing. And so, the two identities only cross paths when the change agent is required to act on change recipients who lack the motivation or willingness to improve their receptiveness to change – to bring themselves on board so there is no resistance (Armenakis et al., 1993; Oreg & Sverdlik, 2011). In the event that resistance does arise, then the change agent's duty is to exercise their managerial prerogative to deal with such insubordination (Hardy & Clegg 2004). This literature thus places the change agent in a privileged position of managing a psychologically deficient or recalcitrant change recipient.

This brings us to yet another 'nihilating' effect (Berger and Luckmann 1967) of depicting change agents as "doing the right and proper things while change recipients throw up unreasonable obstacles or barriers intent on 'doing in' and 'screwing up' the change" (Ford, Ford & D'Amelio, 2008: 362; see also Dent and Goldberg, 1999). Constructing a 'resistant', 'poorly motivated', 'conservative', 'fearful' change recipient warrants a legitimate identity for champions of change. By creating the other as in need of training, coaching or guidance, they become the ideal targets for those wishing to be trainers, coaches, experts or leaders. Training, coaching and even coercion then become appropriate actions. Framing resistance as a negative response grants change agents the right – if not the duty – to use whatever means necessary to prevent or overcome resistance (Hardy & Clegg, 2004), fighting and beating the "enemy inside" (Diefenbach 2007: 130). Ironically, the identity of the change agent hinges on the existence of resistance, despite all the protestations that it impedes organizational functioning and threatens managerial prerogatives. Without 'villainous' resistance to overcome, there is no legitimate reason to use power against employees, and no 'heroic' change agent to win the battle.

Promoting Change; Celebrating Resistance

More recently, some organizational change scholars have advocated a different approach to resistance, pointing out that demonizing it has done little to ensure successful change. While still prioritizing the need for organizations to engage in change, they suggest that resistance might have a role to play in ensuring such initiatives are successful. Resistance may be prompted by legitimate concerns that existing change plans are problematic in some way and, by resisting them, more effective measures may be put in place (e.g., Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Furst & Cable, 2000). Resistance can therefore aid the organizational change initiative (Ford et al., 2008). Middle managers, in particular, can make an important contribution to organizational change by questioning the claims and understandings of senior – and possibly out of touch – managers (Lüscher & Lewis 2008; Woolridge, Schmid & Floyd, 2008). Similarly, participation by employees and other stakeholders can enhance change initiatives by challenging taken-for-granted assumptions (Van Dam et al., 2008).

This work conceptualizes resistance as a process whereby change agents make sense of the responses of change recipients. It suggests that what change agents interpret as 'resistance' may, in fact, be novel ideas for different kinds of change (or different ways of implementing it) that could benefit the organization and its members (Piderit, 2000). According to this view, 'resistance' is conceptualized as a 'counter-offer' to proposals for change. In making this counter-offer change recipients are seeking some form of accommodation from their superiors (Ford et al., 2008). This form of resistance is not adversarial and can be resolved "through the negotiation of mutually sensible meanings" (Dobosz-Bourne & Jankowicz, 2006: 2030). The role of change agents is to *harness* resistance; not eradicate it. Resistance is no longer a form of dysfunctional behaviour, but a pool of alternative ideas to be explored and negotiated through interactions between change agent and change recipient. During this process, the former makes sense of the reaction of the latter – is it resistance or not. Specific actions are not "in and of themselves, resistance, and they do not become resistance unless and until change agents assign the label *resistance* to them" (Ford et al., 2008:

371). If change agents can only avoid being defensive and labelling behaviour as resistance and, instead, make accommodations by changing aspects of the change initative, behaviours may never be labelled as resistance – rather they become contributions to an improved change process (see Thomas & Hardy, 2011).

This literature recasts the identities of change agents and change recipients, although somewhat ambiguously. The managerial variant of this perspective reflexively evaluates the counterproductive effects of diminishing and demeaning others as recalcitrant which, argue Ford et al. (2008), is self-fulfilling because it *produces* the recalcitrant change recipient. Demonizing resistance also fails to tap into potentially productive ideas for bringing about change. Turning the spotlight on to the change agents' own views and actions in relation to resistance, and recasting change recipients as well-informed, thoughtful and motivated by rightful concerns, grants the latter rationality and legitimacy. Change recipients have the potential to become change agents (subject to the agreement of the change agent, as we explain below) – heroes who overcome the recalcitrance of formally designated, but short-sighted and narrow-minded, change agents by resisting in ways that enhance the change initiative (Ford et al., 2008). Here, it is not only the official change agent who is the architect of the change; change recipients can also contribute to it.

Does this mean that the demarcation and status differential between change agent and change recipient break down? Can change recipients become change agents by strategically resisting? Not according to Ford and his colleagues (2008). These authors continue to accord privilege to the change agent, who is privileged in being able to decide on whether to label certain acts and behaviours as resistance. In fact, this identity talks it into existence**:** it only exists if labelled as such by change agents. Equally, it is only within the purview of the change agent to 'accommodate' resistance, appropriating apparently resistant actions into a successful change initiative. This change agent is now responsible not only for the change, but also for the construction of the change recipient as resistant or compliant (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). So, although the work celebrating resistance revisits and revalues it, it remains located within the same

ideological framework, securing the interests and identities of self-appointed change agents. The template for conceptualizing change agent-change recipient roles and relations remains firmly intact. Without a corresponding change in power relations, change recipients remain dependent on change agents (Thomas et al., 2011; Courpasson et al., 2012).

A particular type of reifying self-other talk undergirds this perspective – in pursuing change without questioning its rationality or desirability, a self-proclaimed agent of change grants reluctant change recipients the right to speak up, to translate their reluctance into critical engagement, and thus to contribute 'positively' to the change process. Instead of blaming, critiquing, psychologizing, and pathologizing others for being resistant, it adopts a more benevolent strategy as change agents approach change recipients in an amiable way. It is a prelude to a happy ending – successful change – by building on the expectation that the latter returns the favour by benevolently contributing to the change process. The underlying assumption is that empowering so-called change recipients to participate actively in the change process turns out to be a more productive self-fulfilling prophecy, producing an 'other' that is compliant and critically involved. In fact, being kind to others makes it more difficult for them to resist, subtly pushing them into willing compliance. Ultimately, it is in the interest of change agents to eventually be able to present a collaborative staff, because a grudging staff reflects badly on them, making them look incompetent. So again, change agents construct an other that suits not only their purposes, but also their own preferred identity as an expert in overcoming resistance to change.

Challenging Change; Celebrating Resistance

Critical researchers challenge both these approaches to resistance by rejecting a managerialist agenda. Instead, they adopt a more sceptical view of organizational change and the broader industrial regime in which employees are situated. This research emphasizes the oppressive nature of contemporary work practices – from the relentless pressure of the assembly line through to the electronic surveillance of the modern call centre. Rather than accept the managerial case that

organizational change is necessary and desirable, these researchers are more likely to consider its effects on lowering wages, deskilling employees, intensifying work practices, undermining unions, and stacking the deck in collective bargaining negotiations. With roots in industrial sociology and labour process theory (e.g., Burawoy 1979; Edwards 1986), and adopting the vantage point of the dominated, this work is interested in – and supportive of – the methods used by workers to 'get by' and to 'get back' at management (Thompson & Ackroyd, 1995). Consequently, resistance is both legitimate and desirable: "the expression of an irreducible opposition between workers and management" (Courpasson, et al., 2012: 802), and "the inevitable result of the objective exploitation of labour by capital" (Spicer & Böhm, 2007: 1669).

Like the demonizing approach, resistance is seen in the form of entrenched and inevitable opposition between employers and employees , although what is important here is the interests of the latter rather than the former (cf. Agócs, 1997). Moreover, the employee is not framed as a willing change recipient but as a 'resistant subject' – expected, even obligated to resist the changes imposed on her or him. The empirical focus of this critical work has tended to be in deliberate, collective resistance to change initiatives that threaten employee interests and working conditions, ranging from Luddite protests to guild-based syndicalism and, particularly, the trade union movement. It includes unofficial strategies such as wildcat strikes, 'go-slows', occupations and 'working-to-rule' (Spicer & Böhm, 2007), as well as informal practices such as 'banana time' (Roy 1958) and 'making out' (Burawoy 1979). In all these cases, resistance is organized – coordinated, collective and deliberate. There are those who decide change and those who are at the receiving end of it; and these positions are fixed (Courpasson, et al., 2012). Resistance is an inevitable, adversarial response to power: the roles are allocated, the script is written, and the power relations are established.

Some critical writers have sought to redress the emphasis on collective, organized forms of resistance by introducing the notion of 'subjective' forms of resistance (Thomas and Davies 2005). Building on the work of Foucault, these researchers examine more idiosyncratic, uncoordinated

forms of resistance (e.g., Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994; Knights & McCabe 2000; Fleming & Spicer, 2008).

> With Foucault, the emphasis shifts from structural, class-based analysis of power and resistance, which are the focus of many labour process analysts, such as Braverman (1974), to discursive dynamics of the construction of subjectivities and the epistemological and ethical complexities this entails. Hence, the Foucauldian response to traditional labour process theory is one that emphasizes the expansion of our understanding of the organization of power and resistance beyond the narrow conceptions of economic class antagonisms in the workplace (Spicer & Böhm, 2007: 1670).

According to this view, resistance and power are not separate, opposing forces. They are intertwined – transversal, iterative and adaptive responses to each other (Ezzamel, Willmott & Worthington, 2001). Resistance involves an ongoing process of adaptation and subversion as individuals reflect on their situation, and engage in identity work to shift meanings and understandings (Thomas & Davies, 2005). Thus poststructuralist approaches have emphasised moving away from viewing resistance as an expression of class-consciousness by economically and environmentally determined actors, to recognise the situated discursive construction of resistance subjectivities and practices. Nonetheless, there is still the tendency in this work to assume relatively fixed identities as a result of the subject positions they occupy as, for example, with 'managers' positioned in the discourse of Total Quality Management (Knights & McCabe, 2000), 'profesionals' situated within the discourse of New Public Management (Thomas & Davies, 2005), or 'workers' located in the discourse of 'lean manufacturing' (Ezzamel et al., 2001).

The critical literature, in sum, reclaims the legitimacy of resistance by identifiying with those who stand up to the reigning powers. The resistant subject becomes 'self' and change agents become 'other', turning the tables on the privileged change agent. Whether informed by labour process theory or Foucault, it demarcates change agents and change recipients – in a radically

different way than the other two approaches, but in an equally fixed and deterministic manner. Change agents are seen as representatives of capitalists' interests, intent on appropriating surplus value of labour or as managers increasing their control through practices of new public management and enterprise. Either way, a series of oppositional categories sets up a moral hierarchy, placing employers' oppression and exploitation in opposition to employees' rightful resistance and rebellion. By demeaning change agents and embracing resistance, it resists, reverses and upends, managerialist views, but it still typecasts and ascribes fixed identities to organizational actors, promoting deterministic and dualistic thinking. Distributing 'good' and 'evil' unequally and painting a black-and-white contrast romanticize the resistant change recipient, who can do no wrong, while dismissing the change agent. In other words, this body of work is still locked into essentialist understandings and reified categories of identity, preconceiving organizational actors as victimized subjects, subtle resisters, exploitative managers, etc.

In summary, these three views of resistance each work with an assumption of fixed identities for those involved in the change process. By celebrating change and demonizing resistance, researchers construct an heroic change agent championing change, to which an ignorant or fearful change recipient responds in a compliant or obstructive manner. Celebrating change and resistance still involves conceiving of the change agent-recipient relationship in a fixed and unproblematised manner, with the change agent empowered to determine whether the recipient's response is compliant or oppositional. Finally, demonizing change and celebrating resistance may allow researchers to reject a managerialist agenda but it still portrays fixed identities: labour process inspired work views resistant identities as expressions of class consciousness, while Foucauldian research is concerned with resistance as arising from how subjects are positioned in discourse. Regardless of whether viewed positively or negatively, therefore, each of the three approaches reifies identities, fixing actors as either advocates or adversaries of change (see Table 1).

Table 1. General characteristics of three views of resistance to change that feature in different literatures

	Celebrating Change; Demonizing Resistance	*Celebrating Change and Resistance*	*Demonizing Change; Celebrating Resistance*
Theoretical Foundations	Organizational Development (OD)	Microsociology, interpretivism	Labour Process Theory, Foucauldian post structuralism
Key Proponents	Kotter and Schlesinger, 1979	Ford, Ford and D'Amelio, 2008	Thompson & Ackroyd, 1995 Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994
Cause of resistance	Employee intransigence	Senior management defensiveness	Changes that threaten employees' interests, working conditions and identities
Status of resistance	Illegitimate	Legitimate	Legitimate
Change agent subject position	Rational, knowledgeable, heroic	Defensive, misguided, partial knowledge	Evil, expoitative
Change recipient subject position	Ignorant, fearful or difficult	Knowledgeable, willing	Knowledgeable, heroic
Positioning	Change agent is privileged as champion of change and serving everyone's best interests	Change agent is privileged insofar they decide whether or not actions and identities are resistant	Change recipient is privileged insofar as they act reasonably under provocation and act against exploitation
Power relations	Unitarist: wider capitalist framework taken for granted	Unitarist: wider capitalist framework taken for granted	Radical: wider capitalist framework directly challenged
Authorized action	Managerial prerogative – coercion by senior managers	Managerial prerogative – managers decide who and what is resistant practices and identities	Strikes, sabotage by employees/assertion of alternative identities/discourses
Practical issues	Demonizing resistance has not resulted in its eradication; change agents are likely to ignore 'good' ideas from subordinates if they deviate from their vision for the change	Change agents may not have the expertise to assess accurately whether the change recipients' response will 'improve' the change effort	Assumes change is bad when it may create more/better employment or be necessary to protect conditions; subjective resistant may have little impact.
Ethical issues	Assumes change is for the good and change agent is doing the right thing. Fails to take into account that changes may be detrimental or exploitative	Changes are vulnerable in that if they do not resist, change recipients risk being penalized for not contributing to the change effort; if they do offer different ideas, they may get labeled as resistant.	Those who don't resist are labeled as failing in some way

Resistance and the Reification of Identities

As we have noted above, the majority of the work on organizational change, regardless of its

theoretical position, tends to reify identities in relation to resistance. This seems at oddswith current

work on identity construction, which emphasizes the fluidity of identity. Moreover, the work on subjective resistance has started to incorporate an understanding of the ebb and flow of power-resistance relations, and research on change has also shifted attention away from a focus on 'monological' accounts of change towards an analysis of its 'dialogic' (Gergen et al. 2004), 'plurivocal' (Brown, 2006: 734), and 'multi-authored' nature (Buchanan and Dawson, 2007). Accordingly, both change and resistance can be understood as continuous processes of organizational'becoming' (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

> [Resistance is] an ongoing social and material accomplishment, something to achieve, constituted and sustained by the work of actors who overtly engage in a given struggle (Courpasson, et al., 2012: 816).

Thus change and resistance have to be brought into being – they are both constructed and contested in a process of discursive struggle over alternative and competing views (cf. Smith & Graetz, 2011). It may be, therefore, more useful to talk of chang*ing* and resist*ing* to allow for understanding how ongoing processes become stabilized into particular sedimented meanings at particular points in time (Hardy & Thomas, 2014). Instigating-implementing-resisting-negotiating change in organizational settings is a working process, a project, and a struggle between participants in specific organizational relations. As we demonstrate in the following vignette, self-other talk about change may appear to lock individuals into reified identities in relation to the change, but as this talk shifts so, too, do these identities with the result that individuals 'become' change agents, recipients and resistors at different points in time.

Vignette: The Construction of Identities in a Change Workshop[1]

A change initiative is underway to replace the old engineering focus with a customer orientation at UTel, a European telecommunications company previously part of the much larger GlobalTel. Since being spun off from GlobalTel, the company is no longer selling phones to end-users. Instead, it is selling software and knowledge to mobile phone manufacturers. The change program involves 80 workshops across the

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[1] Adapted from Thomas, Sargent & Hardy (2011).

company, and in different countries, bringing together around 30 senior management, local management and employees. The aim is to secure involvement and input from employees and to bring about agreement on what the nature of the new culture should be and how it should be implemented from across the company.

In one workshop in a UK plant, a senior UK manager starts the session by welcoming participants, saying: "We need to get a common understanding between all of the sites so that we have things in tune in terms of going forward. The idea here is to have a workshop with the line managers, where you can hopefully carry this message through to the rest of the organisation and we can develop that going further so that we can take that right down to the engineers and hopefully feed back any concerns and issues that may crop up as a result of the discussions going forward." He then introduces the head office managers, one of whom provides an overview of the outline and goals of the workshop. Another UK manager makes a presentation describing his interpretation of the local culture and its strengths and weaknesses, which is followed by a discussion about whether this interpretation is accurate. Following a coffee break UTel's mission statement is discussed and a video featuring the CEO is shown. The participants then complete a "stop/start/continue" exercise to identify one behavior that has been hindering cultural change and needs to be stopped, one new behavior that needs to be started, and one existing behavior that should be continued. The workshop concludes with a discussion of how to implement the cultural change.

A number of discussion points feature during the course of the three-hour workshop. In one thread, the meaning of a ***customer focus*** is debated. A senior UK manager introduces the need to achieve a "common understanding" of customer focus. A head office manager then puts forward a number of suggestions on how customer focus might be understood in terms of the relationship with the customer. A senior manager then seeks clarification on who the customer is and whether they are talking about the end-user (the person who buys and uses the phone) or another business (i.e., the customer is another company that manufactures and sells phones). This comment triggers a lively debate concerning who the customer is.

One of the participants then challenges the assumption that the UK site is not already customer focused:
> I believe that we're [local site] customer-oriented. I think we are customer focused as an organization and we have been all the way through even in our history. I think we're a customer-focused organization.

A new debate then ensues over whether or not the UK site is more or less customer-focused compared to head office. The discussion shifts away to the nature of the relationship with the customer, but returns to claims that the UK site is already customer focused. This claim is disputed by some employees, but supported by others. The discussion then returns to who the customer is and the claim that the UK site is already customer focused reemerges.

At this point, the importance of a customer focus is challenged at a more fundamental level as a participant argues that there is a need for a *commercial* focus:
> We are very driven by engineers and the technology … people do get caught up with developing incredible products that are fantastic with loads of features but from a commercial focus aren't really needed ... as an organization we're not necessarily as commercially and business focused as we need to be.

This comment is followed by a long silence. A manager attempts to shift the emphasis away from the accusation that the company lacks a commercial focus by arguing that it is sales and marketing staff who are responsible for the customer, but the discussion quickly returns to the need for a commercial focus. The point is made and that while engineers may be close to the customer, this is not helpful *unless* they have a commercial focus.

This discussion returns once again to who the customer is – the end-user or the business that sells the phone. Throughout this discussion, the claim that the company is already customer focused reappears, as does the need for a commercial focus. During this discussion, a gradual consensus develops regarding what a commercial focus would mean e.g., being financially aware and helping the company to be profitable.
> Commercial … to me means … UTel profitability. And it doesn't matter a hell of a lot about customer profitability, customer on time, customer this, customer that and customer the other.

By the end of the discussion, the group comes to an agreement that a customer focus is less important than the need for a commercial focus.

A second discussion item concerns the meaning of ***implementation*** i.e., how the culture change is to be implemented. At the start of the workshop, a head office manager specifies one of objectives is to arrive at a *collective* identification of the actions necessary to implement the change at the local site. Some time later, an employee picks up the issue of implementation, suggesting that it requires a clear direction, which is currently lacking: "we need to know where we're going … how we fit in, making sure the whole thing hangs together." Another employee then suggests that, rather than a lack of direction, the issue is a lack of information although this is countered by yet another employee who complains about the lack of direction. At this point, a head office manager tries to divert the debate by arguing that it is difficult to establish a clear direction. An employee attempts to press the head office manager to define implementation in terms of the need for direction but to no avail.

Participants then debate what implementation should entail with divisions arising between employees, who want more direction and tighter timeframes, and senior managers who want to see more workshops rolled out. At this point, an employee draws attention to the power of head office to decide what implementation is, rather than employees through the workshops. The head office manager reinforces this point by, first, defining implementation in terms of further workshops rather than direction and timelines, and then invoking the CEO to reinforce his point:

> [The CEO] is very interested … in this work. We have been running culture workshops now in [the various sites] and he has gone through the material with myself and sometimes with [another head office manager]. Now he really wants to see what kind of culture you have here and that's the first step [through the workshops].

Another head office manager backs up this statement.

Following the video, employees return to press the point about implementation needing direction and timelines but they are ignored when a head office manager returns to implementation as requiring further workshops. Other senior managers start to issue directives concerning subsequent workshops requiring participants to be involved in them. Employees try to return yet again to the need for a road map, milestones and action plans as part of successful implementation, rather than more workshops:

> [We need] some plan going forward rather than being an isolated activity… the bit that's missing to my mind is what the next steps are? We do this but then what's the next step?

A head office manager then says that the next implementation step will be decided by head office, contradicting an earlier argument that actions are to be collectively identified. An employee returns to the need for a time line, while a head office manager returns to the need to conduct further workshops. The same manager refers to possible job losses if the change initiative does not go well, implying a possible threat to employees. Again, an employee raises the need for road maps and, yet again, a head office manager defines implementation in terms of a set of activities decided by head office. There is another attempt to define implementation in terms of time lines by employees, which is directly refuted by a head office manager, who says: "that's not [what] you should be doing."

This vignette shows instances of identity talk in discursive struggles over the organizational change which, by the end of the workshop, has resulted in attempts to fix and reify 'self' and 'other' in relation to the change. Particularly when employees criticize the "lack of direction" and press for a road map, milestones and action plans, head office managers, who prefer to see implementation evolve through the culture workshops, take up a defensive position. Provoked by employees' oppositional voice, their talk emphasizes directives, reminds participants of head office's discretionary powers, and suggests possible job losses. Senior managers systematically ignore or

refute employees' requests for direction and timelines, dismiss alternative suggestions, and draw on their position in the hierarchy to silence their subordinates. The use of coercive communicative practices to discredit the suggestions of employees escalates. The talk of senior managers draws them into an authoritarian-oppositional dynamic, presents 'self' as the only rightful agents of change in opposition to 'resistant' voices. Meanwile, employees are cast as the other – in a submissive recipient role.

Despite the way in which this talk appears to have 'locked' participants into particular identities, the analysis also shows how subject positions dramatically *shift* throughout the workshop as the self-other talk changes. The workshop starts with attempts to bridge self-other divides. Engaging in inclusive identity talk (Ybema, Vroemisse & van Marrewijk 2011), participants initially construct a shared identity of change agents working together on articulating a joint UTel's identity, such as when the senior UK manager introduces the session by saying that idea is for the line managers to "carry this message through to the rest of the organisation." In the case of a customer focus, both employees and senior managers regularly build on earlier interventions by 'self' and 'other' as the two categories blur. Senior managers take up ideas from their subordinates, instead of rejecting them as 'resistance.' The resistant subject is absent as senior managers and employees build on each other's meanings during the workshop, even though it reappears by the end.

The resistant identity is thus in a situation of 'becoming' (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) throughout the workshop. Sometimes, managers label their subordinates as change agents or as 'resistant' in a positive way, as in the case of customer focus. Sometimes they label them as resistant in the more traditional way i.e., as impeding the change effort, as in the case of implementation. Sometimes, employees take on a resistant identity, in challenging what is being proposed, while at other times they are more compliant or pro-change. At times, they were willing to challenge hierarchy and question the ideas coming from their superiors; at other times they invoked hierarchy by demanding actions from their superiors that were commensurate with them

leading – and taking responsibility for – the change. Accordingly, resistant identities are brought

into being through the communicative practices of the different actors. Moreover, as the resistant

subject both forms and dissolves so, too, does the change agent identity. Thus resistant subject and

change agent are continually becoming through diverse self-other talk – sometimes becoming more

evident and sometime less; and sometimes melding and at other times distinct.

Discussion

We have sought to make the case that identity is a useful perspective for studying resistance

to organizational change. To demonstrate its contribution, we critically discussed how scholarly

texts on resistance to change, as well as participants in a change workshop, routinely construct

participants in the process either as agents of change or (willing or resistant) recipients of change. A

first insight stemming from our analysis is that discourse on resistance to change tends to fix and

reify 'self' and 'other', invoking a rather simplistic binary opposition. While critical identity

theorists tend to theorize identities as fluid, constantly constructed and reconstructed in people's

sayings and doings, the manner in which organizational actors and scholars of resistance to change

construct and reconstruct resistant identities frequently serves to produce or perpetuate essentialist

notions of self and other. The main characters in change and resistance are cast in oppositional

roles, engaging in talk that promotes a particular 'self' (e.g., a heroic agent or resister of change)

and degrades an 'other' (e.g., an exploitative change agent or a stubbornly resistant change

recipient). Even when organizational actors switch their positioning from one situation to another

(as shown in the vignette), they nonetheless draw clear-cut self-other distinctions and engage in

'essentializing' talk. Self-proclaimed champions of change tend to cast themselves as active agents

in control of the process, while others are either passive recipients in need of direction or they are

resistant users who "are basically just a little frightened" (head of the organization quoted by

Symon, 2005: 1650). By actively voicing the "resistor" as if referring to an abstract category, the

manager does not talk about particular persons, but about a broader "type" of "unreasonable die-

hards" (Symon 2005: 1651). Ascribing such fixed identities to oneself and to others allows the speaker to place, or perhaps to push, 'self' and 'other' into particular roles.

A second, somewhat contradictory insight from identity studies is helpful for understanding change and resistance as process, struggle or accomplishment, also shown in our vignette. Here we see that identities, as they are constructed in everyday organizational life are not clear-cut and fixed, but are constructed differently across time and space as a result of particular situational dynamics and issues. A processual view shows how identities are constructed differently over time in the ebb and flow of shifting circumstances, power constellations, economic conditions, etc. This is also what recent identity studies show. For instance, organizational actors make situational and strategic shifts in their identifications (Koot, 1997; Ybema & Byun, 2011): they may switch from change agent to change recipient or back in their social identification (Thomas, Sargent and Hardy 2011), position themselves in-between two identities (e.g., Ellis & Ybema 2010; Iedema et al., 2003; Zabusky & Barley, 1997), or present themselves as bridging categorical alternatives (Ybema, Vroemisse & van Marrewijk, 2012). In a similar vein, the supposedly clear-cut dichotomy of change agents and change recipients may be more ephemeral and convoluted in day-to-day practice. In a process of change, the self-elected change agent may also be a change recipient – every senior manager is as much a subject and object of change (albeit in different ways), as are shop floor employees. Due to their position in the organizational hierarchy, middle managers in particular may epitomize this double subjectivity, being targeted as object and implementer of change policies, and spanning these two identities in their self-presentation. Those who start out as defenders of change, can become its opponents; and those who oppose it can come to support it (e.g., Kellogg, 2009; Thomas & Hardy, 2011).

In sum, actors have more opportunities than limited positioning within the unilateral sender-receiver model currently popular in literatures on resistance to change (and also evident in, for instance, the popular distinction between sensegiving and sensemaking). Instead of fixed essences and clear-cut distinctions between producers and consumers of change, the identities of change

agents, change recipients and resistant subjects should be seen as transient constructs, negotiated between actors involved in the process (cf. Ybema, Keenoy et al., 2009). So, identity research may describe the overtly dynamic moments of change and resistance, capturing identity in flight, as well as the apparently stable patterns when organizational actors attempt to secure a particular status quo, catching identity in slumber or, perhaps, kept in slumber (van Hulst, Ybema & Yanow, forthcoming).

Concluding Thoughts

So, what might be identity's contribution to the study of resistance? Analytically, an identity perspective offers a vantage point from which to analyse how scholars and practitioners engage in discourse of selfhood and otherhood when negotiating change and discussing resistance. A fine-grained identity analysis allows to show how essentializing, self-congratulatory self-other talk creates 'locked in' identities that privilege a preferred version of the 'self' while simultaneously confine others to a socially, politically or morally marginalized position. Subsequently, showing the shifts and slides in self-other talk helps us to appreciate the dynamics of negotiations over change and resistance to change. Inadvertently or unreflexively, scholarly literatures on resistance to change tend to engage in reifying identity talk that makes them moralize rather than theorize resistance, blocking their view of the actual ebb and flow of organizational actors constructing 'change' or 'resistance', changing their positioning, and stepping in and out of 'championing' or 'resisting'. Practically, such an identity perspective allows us to deconstruct actors' and scholars' sensemaking efforts in relation to change and resistance and opens up a window upon alternative 'realities', potentially redirecting efforts to bring about or resist change. Ethically, it demonstrates how both marginal and dominant actors make use of representational strategies that denigrate and diminish the other whilst empowering the self. 'Others' are not asked to construct their selves in their own codes and categories, but are instead abstracted and reified in negative terms to establish, sustain or challenge power asymmetries. Others may politically manoeuvre in ways that resist such

colonizing identity talk by offering alternative versions of self and other and, through such

discursive struggles, not only self and other, but also change and resistance, become contested and

morally tainted categories.

In using identity to shed light on resistance, we have concentrated on the discourse about

and of change agents and change recipients. By doing so, we have ignored other aspects of identity

that may also be relevant for analyzing resistance. Future identity research may therefore take

different directions to explore resistance. One such direction concerns *collective* identities. The

vignette shows participants identifying the UK subsidiary's collective identity vis-à-vis the

company's head quarters. Accordingly, constructions of national identity (e.g., Ailon-Souday &

Kunda 2003), organizational identity (e.g., Carlsen 2006), social movements (e.g., Gongaware,

2003) and other forms of collective identity (e.g., Symon 2005; Ybema 2010) may be powerful

vehicles for the exercise of hegemony and resistance, producing or opposing power. Koot (1997)

illustrates how employees use their national or ethnic identities situationally and strategically in

their struggles against management: Curaçaoan employees working in a Shell plant on the Dutch

Caribbean island of Curaçao in the 1960s and 1970s resisted by claiming a Latino identity. This

changed, however, in the 1980s when the refinery was rented out to a Venezuelan company: the

same Curaçaoan workers started to dissociate themselves from Latino culture and, instead praised

the old Shell culture and called upon their Dutch roots (for similar studies, see, e.g., Ailon-Souday

& Kunda 2004; Ybema & Byun, 2011). Thus, we see both the use of self-other talk to create an

alternative collective identity, as well as how this collective identity changed over time. We also

focused on *relational* identity talk of selves and others, ignoring another rich resource for

constructing hegemonic and resistant identities: the *temporal* construction of identity (e.g., Bryant

& Wolfram Cox, 2004; Sonenshein, 2010). While relational identity talk constructs selfhood in

relation to other actors, temporal identity talk derives a sense of self by drawing on the collective or

individual past, present and future. Temporal invocations are relevant for studying processes of

change and resistance, as both utopian ideals and nostalgic renderings of a common past may serve

as a source of inspiration and orientation (e.g., McDonald et al., 2006; Ybema, 2010).

There are, then, different ways in which an identity perspective can contribute to the future study of resistance to change. We also see scope for further work on the analysis of discourse in relation to on change agents and change recipients. Rather than abstracting and reifying accounts of resistance to change – as we have shown a range of literatures do – researchers might take greater advantage of the insights gained through the study of identity construction by empirically grounding their analyses in organizational actors' articulations of their and others' identities – in policy reports they write, meetings they hold, gossip in which they engage or in banter they exchange – that help us to understand the complex dynamics of change and resistance. It is unhelpful to simplify identities in terms of fixed dichotomies between change-minded managers and resistant recipients of change. By analyzing the discursive positioning being undertaken vis-à-vis change and resistance, we can see how identities, change and resistance are talked into (and out of) existence. This process of identity construction is dialogic, contexted, precarious, and conflicted: organizational actors seek to establish, maintain or disrupt particular notions of who they are and who others are in discursive struggles over organizational change. In this process, identities are situational constructions and temporary accomplishments instead of fixed categories or deep essences. This, we believe, holds promise for future analyses of change and resistance.

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