

**Games People Play to Influence Others At Work:
Analysis of a collection of short stories.**

Robin A. Hill (PhD).
Waikato Institute of Technology
Tristram Street, Private Bag 3036
Hamilton 2020
NEW ZEALAND

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Games people play

Abstract

In order to identify tactics people in organisations use to overcome lack of *voice* ten short stories were collected that described *games* or *tricks* that had been used to influence others who would normally be resistant or immune to such influence. Independent coders analyzed the stories by: a hybrid self-characterization technique for *within story analysis*, a repertory test method for *between story analysis*, and a nominal-group-type workshop to reach agreement. The results provided insight into why personnel are able and unable to influence and motivate others and also suggest tactics that change agents may use to overcome resistance and gain *voice*.

Games People Play to Influence Others At Work: Analysis of a collection of short stories

The research had its under-pinning in the organisational behavior domains of resistance to change, powerlessness and *lack of voice* of employees and how people at work overcome these.

The intention was to collect a series of short stories of *games* or tricks that people have played at work to influence others, to unwittingly change their behaviours, to implement procedures and so on. Of particular interest (but not exclusively) were the games or tricks employed by potential change agents or technical experts to overcome resistance to change of their more senior management and thereby effect change despite relative powerlessness or suppression of *voice*.

It was the experience and observation of this investigator that juniors and technicians very often have far reaching and practically beneficial suggestions to make to their higher management. Frequently these change agents made suggestions in the interests of innovation crucial to optimizing the viability and currency of the firm. However, for one reason or another, their suggestion was discounted. There appeared to be many factors that potentially contributed to this, including management egotism ("I am the one who is supposed to look good and come up with all the good ideas round here"), management arrogance ("we know it all and no one else can advise us in our specialist area"), prejudice ("she is a graduate, academic, and hence her ideas are impracticable") and simple unwillingness to listen or communicate effectively.

This observation seems supported by Hamel (1996) who indicated that in many respects the middle personnel are the driving force of organisational change, and not as might popularly be thought - top management, who Hamel described as powerful defenders of orthodoxy.

According to Hamel (1996) top Executive level Managers get there because they are experienced. They were probably the innovative revolutionary middle managers in their day. Yet, according to Hamel, these top managers tend to be one of the main constraints to change. Text books tend to discuss *resistance to change* as employee resistance to top management plans for change. Previous observations and research of the current author (Hill 2004), supported by Hamel (1996), Goldratt (1990) and an increasing number of other authors, indicates that a debilitating form of resistance, is that of top management to listen to and heed the change suggestions of their middle personnel and technical experts.

Schmidt & Kipnis (1982) noted that upward influence was exercised more frequently for organisational rather than personal reasons. Kipnis, Schmidt, Swaffin-Smith & Wilkinson(1984) observed that articles relating to upward influence generally relied upon books and anecdotes, many of which focus on impression formation, deceit, and various ploys and dirty tricks to overcome the resistance of others. They state that there is little evidence that these behaviours are effective. Further, the advice generated from these studies is frequently contradictory. While some suggest assertiveness, others suggest stealth; while some suggest use of rationality others warn that rationality prompts counter reasoning (for example Goldratt, 1990).

Use of story telling

The importance of the story as a unit of analysis has been suggested by a number of authors, (for example Fuller [cited by Honey, 1992], Mair,1988 and Rhodes 1996). Anthropologists and ethnographers have long been aware of the importance of storytelling their methodologies.

Fuller suggested that the story maybe the basic building block of human learning. Mair (1988) claimed that psychology should more clearly recognize itself as a storytelling discipline and illustrated the pervasive ways stories shape our lives. “Stories are habitations. We live in and through stories. They conjure worlds. We do

not know the world other than as a story world. Stories inform life. They hold us together and keep us apart” (Mair 1988, p. 127).

In relation to the concepts of personal constructivism (that we live by our own unique and privately constructed view of the world) and social constructionism (that so-called reality represents a socially constructed view of the world) our schema or construct systems represent a *master story*. According to Mair (1988) we serve and live by that master story. He points out that when we die it is the story that lives on, and that we make considerable effort to keep worthy stories alive. Mair continues that we are told stories from birth and these are important elements in our enculturation and socialization. He points out also that storytelling is related to power and politics. “There are those in positions of given power,.... who are allowed to speak, to be taken seriously, to be listened to.” (Mair 1988 p. 130). There are those too, who are deprived of such rights of telling and being listened to. This message is reiterated by Rhodes (1996).

Mair draws attention to a number of implications for storytelling in the behavioral sciences.

First, if we are to give serious attention to stories, then we must liberate the storytelling, and enable speaking more freely. Mair points out that we are often reluctant to tell our stories and to speak in our own voices. We are trained out of such telling, as if it is the domain of a ruling class of storyteller. These ruling classes may represent for instance the professions and academic disciplines that impose a socially constructed view of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable story. Mair implores that surely we do not want only the storytelling of the ruling class. Rhodes (1996) advocates the same, stating that in organisational research, the benefit of story analysis derives from the multiplicity of voices that may be heard.

Mair also promotes the power of the story in enabling people to imagine how others would cope with different kinds of events, and hence enable themselves to imagine how they might cope in different situations.

Mair asserts that every story telling is a political act; sometimes an act of diplomacy and sometimes “diplomacy by other means” (Mair 1988, p. 132). He further warns that stories are not easy to tell. Stories that speak a fresh word are not easy to compose. Mair also cautions that the teller who does speak in fresh words risks ostracism.

Of relevance to the current research, the story is a medium for giving voice to those not normally permitted voice. This is one proposition underlying this research - that those with valuable suggestions and good stories, are frequently rejected in favor of the stories of their superior manager classes.

Ballard (1993) stressed that research in the form of stories may play a role in contributing empowerment and action. People’s stories of their experiences can have value in various ways as part of a policy for action.

Rhodes (1996) claims that *story telling* is a viable methodology that can be used to research the *voices* in organisation. Rhodes claims that using stories is convenient because they are usually easy to collect, they reduce complexity and are said to embody the person (as opposed to being a study of attitudes, beliefs, motives – Van Buskirk & McGrath, 1992). Stories get to the heart of people’s meaning and individual’s sense-making (Stephens & Eizen, 1984). Additionally story telling is a symbolic form through which organisational members construct shared meaning of an organisation’s reality (Boyce, 1995). In summary, according to Rhodes, using stories as research data enables convenient access to the interpretations, meaning and order that individuals and groups place on their organisational lives.

Rhodes (1996) asked, whose stories should be listened to? Boje (1994) described post-modern organisational learning as the re-introduction of the stories and voices of those usually excluded, marginalized and exploited. Similarly May (1994) criticized much organisational research as being spoken for and representing the voice of authority. Using story telling as a research technique aims at giving voice to stories which are not heard in the traditional narrative of organisational theory. Rhodes goes on to say however that the stories of the authorized power

holders should likewise, not be excluded but that those usually denied voice should be heard alongside them.

Rhodes (1996) also goes on to highlight the reflexive nature of story analysis and criticism of cases where the author's interpretive voices have overshadowed those of the informants. To overcome this Rhodes suggests the researcher be seen as a *ghost writer* rather than a *lone interpreter*. He implies that lone interpreter is to be avoided since then the author just becomes another single voice amid the many voices of organisational life.

Resistance to Change

Goldratt and associates (Goldratt & Cox 1986, Goldratt & Fox 1986, Goldratt 1990) indicate that continuous improvement in organisations is limited by the major constraining factor that exists in that organisational process. This constraint might be a bottleneck at a specific machine in the manufacturing process, the nature of the consumer market or performance inability of key personnel. Goldratt (1990) implies that a major constraint in organisations is management's resistance to change and resistance to heed proposals from subordinate personnel. Goldratt offers some tactics for overcoming such resistance, including alliance forming, transcription of information into the *language* of the other person and appealing to their *superior* knowledge and wisdom.

A search of the ABI-Inform data-base of business literature revealed a number of articles about managerial resistance to change, although very few of them are recent (some examples include Huszczo 1991, Seay 1992, Gogue and Tribus 1993, Peltz 1993, Useem 1993, Lathin 1994, Van Tassel 1994, Maddock 1995, Runge 1995 & Scott 1995).

Within the first eleven pages of his book "Managing with Power" Jeffery Pfeffer (1992) states that he has encountered over and over again, senior executives who claim their organisations take no initiative, and high-level managers who say they

can't or won't engage in efforts to change the organisations they work for, even when they know such changes are important to their survival and success.

Resistance to change was a key area of concern for Hinkle (1965). Personal construct psychology (Kelly 1955) distinguishes between two types of change on personal constructs - shift change and slot change.

Shift change occurs when a person moves from using one construct to using a completely different one. For instance, a bank auditor may begin by viewing a teller's work on the construct *careful vs. careless* but after further scrutiny may **shift** to view it on the construct *honest vs. dishonest*.

Slot change occurs when a person shifts their construal from one pole of a construct to the other. The auditor may initially view the teller's work as *honest* but after further scrutiny change to view it as *dishonest*.

Hinkle (1965) studied resistance to slot change. He measured this as willingness of people to make a slot change on one construct rather than on another construct. Where change on one construct means change on many others and hence means the upheaval or a major restructuring of the construct system, resistance to change can be expected. On the other hand when change means only a minor fine-tuning on one or a few constructs, resistance can be expected to be lower.

Individual's cognitive systems of constructs were viewed by Hinkle (1965) as being hierarchical, and much like a family tree. Hinkle argued that the higher in the hierarchy the construct, the greater the range of implicative links to other constructs. From this he reasoned constructs higher in the hierarchy would be more resistant to change, because any change at that level would also require a larger number of related changes on linked constructs and greater risk of developing inferential incompatibility within the system. To change on a highly superordinate construct (a fundamental value) would mean major overhaul of the construct system - a source of psychological threat. Change on a subordinate construct would mean relatively minor fine adjustment to only a few constructs in the system. The same

reasoning applies to resistance to change on other constructs with multiples of implicative linkage. Hinkle found empirical support for this notion.

Nadler (1987) outlined five individual factors known to make people resistant to change in organisations. These are listed as:

(1) Economic insecurity. Individuals may be expected to resist change when they perceive that it will threaten their livelihood - in terms of either job loss or reduced pay. When *employed - unemployed* or *highly paid - poorly paid* are viewed as personal constructs it can also be argued that a shift from one pole to the other on any one of these would mean change on many other personal constructs and therefore threaten the individual's cognitive system. For example, loss of income precludes other opportunities related to lifestyle and the opportunity to live one's master story.

(2) Fear of the unknown. One establishes their world view by recognizing familiar patterns and creating some semblance of order from the chaos of experience. When a change threatens to disrupt that order and the comfortable patterns, then we can expect resistance to change. Once again, these represent changes that threaten the individual's cognitive view of the world.

(3) Threats to social relationships. When familiar and pervasive social bonds are threatened, by either transfer or displacement, then so too are important sources of social reward and construal of one's world.

(4) Habit. When an employee is comfortable with the familiarity of their job and have habitual ways of performing, resistance can be expected if the proposed change means abandoning those habits, abandoning the familiarity and engaging in the onerous task of relearning or re-educating. Psychological comfort and familiarity are threatened.

(5) Failure to recognize the need for change. Unless individuals recognize and appreciate the need for change, any vested interests they have in maintaining the status quo may motivate them to resist change.

In summary, throughout this discussion of individual resistance to change the term “threat” has been used frequently. We can expect resistance when the proposed change threatens an important and valued part of the individual’s life.

Robbins & Barnwell (1994) associate organisational resistance to change with protection of power, control and vested interests. They note that resistance to change is often associated with the early stages of decline in the organisation life cycle. Whetten (1980) (cited in Robbins & Barnwell) has noted that a major force for resisting change during the initial phases of decline are those vested interests who have benefited most from the growth stage. Since their power base is challenged they are motivated to push for growth related policies even though they no longer make sense in the decline period.

Katz & Kahn (1978) suggested four organisational conditions, other than individual factors, associated with organisational resistance to change. These are listed as:

(1) Structural inertia. Organisations are usually designed to promote stability, and within them jobs are designed for stability also. Hence the forces of selection and reward acting on individuals to perform in specified ways are very powerfully determined - they are structured to have inertia, and the forces promoting inertia are often difficult to resist.

(2) Work Group inertia. Inertia stems not only from the jobs performed but also from the social groups within the organisation. Introducing change disrupts many of the established norms and expectations of work methods and intensity.

(3) Threats to existing balance of power. When personnel change at various levels in an organisation there occurs a shift in the balance of power between individuals and subunits within the organisation. Those units that currently control resources, have expertise and wield power may experience threat to the positions they enjoy in the face of proposed change.

(4) Previously unsuccessful change efforts. Rejection of an idea on the grounds that *we tried that once, but it didn’t work* is cited as one of several

contributors to organisational stagnation. It is understandable that when an individual, group or organisation has met with an unsuccessful introduction of change they are likely to be reluctant to attempt it again.

Power, Powerlessness and denial of Voice.

The concept of power is a hypothetical construct based on the perception of a follower that another individual or group of individuals controls a resource or resources that the follower values, usually of a form conducive with French and Raven's (1959) bases and sources of power. Power does not operate without there also operating a dependency relationship. An individual holds power when followers are dependent upon them for the resources they are perceived to control.

Presumably *powerlessness* occurs in the converse circumstance; when an individual is not perceived as controlling a power base or source and when therefore, no relationship of dependency exists. Hence powerlessness may be expected when an individual does not control or possess (1) an advantageous position in the organisation, (2) personal characteristics such as eloquence or domineering physique, (3) valued expertise, (4) the opportunity to be at the right place at the right time, (5) the opportunity to exercise coercion, (6) the opportunity to use rewards or sanctions, (7) valued knowledge or information.

Of specific interest in the current research was the apparent powerlessness of those who do have expertise, knowledge and opportunity, but who are denied voice by virtue of lack of position within the organisation. As alluded to earlier, these people apparently must resort to tricks and subterfuge in order to gain voice and contribute in an influential way. This has been documented by and referred to as *games people play* by both Burawoy (1979) and Mintzberg (1983). Porter, Allen & Angle (1981) stated that there had been an abundance of research associated with downward influence in organisations. They stated, however, that in contrast there had been little research into upward influence and the associated topic of organisation politics. Since that time a research interest has developed in this

respect, particularly from Kipnis and Schmidt (Schmidt & Kipnis 1982, Kipnis & Schmidt 1988 and Kipnis, Schmidt, Swaffin-Smith and Wilkinson 1984) and also Case, Dosier, Murkison & Keys (1988). This interest in upward influence has contributed greatly to knowledge in the field of organisation power and politics.

Schmidt & Kipnis (1982) noted that upward influence was exercised more frequently for organisational rather than personal reasons. Kipnis et al. (1984) and Kipnes & Schmidt (1988) report the identification of several influence strategies that are open to managers, other than traditional use of power as a function of position.

Case, Dosier, Murkison & Keys (1988) found that successful (in contrast to unsuccessful) attempts at upward influence were more likely from managers who prepared well in terms of supporting data and documentation, who used persistence and repetition and who *touched many bases* for support. Case et al. (1988) noted that their findings contrasted with those of Schilit & Locke (1982) who studied industrial managers and Mowday (1978) who studied upward influence with school principals. From this Case et al. (1988) reasoned that effective methods may be job or environment specific. They also noted that timing appeared to be a salient variable.

According to Pfeffer (1992) the study of power is important. Power is viewed by many with ambivalence. “We know that power and politics exist, we even grudgingly admit that they are necessary to individual success, but we nevertheless don’t like them.” (Pfeffer, 1992, p. 15). Pfeffer continues that our ambivalence stems from recognition that the ends are necessary, but we don’t like the means employed to achieve them. This ambivalence is amplified when we consider that these same strategies and processes that produce outcomes we desire can also be taken to extremes and produce undesirable results.

Pfeffer (1992) states that most medicines can kill if taken in excess and thousands die in automobile accidents annually. We do not however, abandon these things because of the associated dangers. Instead it is necessary to learn more about them, educate people about them, so that we can harness the potentials of excess and

make use of these forces for benefit. The same is so for power. We need to learn about power and educate people (powerful and powerless) so that it can be used as a force for producing benefit, and so that it can be harnessed and countered when exercised to excess or in ways that do not produce benefit.

The literature on managerial resistance to change suggests that power is often used to stifle innovation, to protect territory from threat, and to actually undermine achievement of the goals of the very business being managed. This is the case where power is exercised to excess for purposes that are not productively beneficial. These are cases where the powerless need to understand power and know how to counter that power.

Discourse and power

A discussion of power and powerlessness in organisations would be incomplete without some reference to discourse and power and to the views of authors such as Foucault or Braverman. It is beyond the scope and appropriateness of this paper to discuss this in depth. Readers are referred to Burr (1995) for a succinct account of Foucault's analysis of the inequities of power and also to Johnson (2000) for an equally succinct description of Braverman's (1974) analysis of the inequities of power.

Of relevance to the current study is not only the notion that **knowledge is power** but also that what is seen as *common sense* knowledge is increasingly being viewed as a vehicle for exerting **control** and **power** over sectors of society. Business, commerce and the very structures within it are social entities, constructed and invented by other humans, to exert a subliminal power and control over others. This has relevance to the current research for the extent to which those who control the agenda, also control the dissemination of knowledge and control the opportunity for having *voice*.

Foucault, Braverman and also Burowoy (1979) remind us that denial of **voice**, powerlessness, and powerfulness in organisations is a reflection of inequities

in society at large, and a function of those in power attempting to preserve their inequitable position. The current research was concerned with the ways those denied voice, and treated as powerless, can and do subvert that power to influence those who might otherwise have resisted or suppressed their attempts to influence change.

Rose (1990) has documented the way that the *psy* sciences (psychology, psychiatry, psychometrics) have made what is intangible, internal and subjective about humans, appear to be tangible, measurable and objective. Hence concepts such as attitudes, motivation, morale, intelligence have become measurable and quantifiable.

A main thesis of Rose (1990) appears to be that this quantification and objectification of qualities that are intangible and subjective has provided the opportunity to apply an *instrumentality* to these concepts and thereby use them to control people and control power. In buying into and accepting this, ordinary people contribute to the way they are controlled and regulated. Rose has referred to this as the *governing of the soul* - the control of people by virtue of control of those internal, intangible subjectivities that collectively make up a person's soul; control enabled by seemingly being able to identify and measure the essences of the soul..

The Current Study

Burowoy (1979) documented the way workers play games to overcome management control. Kipnis et alia (1984) observed that upward influence is frequently studied in terms of anecdotes and stories of tricks. Mair (1988) and Rhodes (1996) have made a case for the use of stories and their telling as viable units of analysis in psychological and organisational enquiry. The current research proposed to collect and analyse the stories of tricks, ploys, games and any other tactics that underling change agents had used to successfully influence others.

The initial intention was to limit this to stories of successful attempts, with a specific interest in those attempts aimed at influencing otherwise resistant superiors or peers. It was anticipated that this should satisfy some of the concern expressed by

Kipnis et alia (1984) that many of the scenarios reported in the literature gave very little information about their successfulness. However, as the research progressed, discussion with colleagues suggested that stories that described *hitting one's head against a brick wall* may be equally revealing and equally valuable to collect.

Part of the purpose of the current study was, as Mair (1988) and Rhodes (1996) have suggested, to give subordinates a *voice* - an opportunity to tell their story. To liberate the story telling and enable subordinates to communicate what they did and how; to liberate stories that were normally kept to themselves, or only shared within their own tight social circle.

Another purpose aligns with Mair's (1988) notion that the story enables people to imagine alternative ways of dealing with given situations. Likewise, the stories collected in the course of the current study were hoped to serve a similar intent in enhancing the repertoire of imaginable and viable upward influencing behaviours that an individual might invoke.

If the literature cited above, (Kipnis and associates 1982, 1984, 1988; Case et alia 1988) has credence, then we can expect that some of these stories will conform to the strategies and tactics identified by these authors. If Goldratt's (1990) suggestions are viable, then we might expect stories of alliance forming, transcription of information into the language of the target and appeal to superior knowledge and wisdom (perhaps egotism) of one's seniors.

We can expect stories of tactics that attempted to reduce the impression of psychological threat, and that perhaps reflect an attempted win-win compromise.

Method

Subjects/Respondents

Because the method for collection of stories was invitational and from people who the investigator encouraged to maintain their own anonymity and confidentiality, demographic details of respondents were not recorded. However, it

can be reported that responses were received from males only. All of them were older than 40 years of age and at the time of collecting their stories all had professional qualifications. All but one of the stories came from a time when the respondents were working either for local or central government or for a State Owned Enterprise.

Other participants: To overcome investigator bias or *lone interpreter* effects in the analysis of the stories, in addition to the investigator, two collaborators were employed to provide an inter-coder analysis. Both of the additional participants (referred to hereafter as "coders") had Masters degrees: one with a Masters in organisational communication, (a male aged in his 50's) and the second with a Masters in sport science (a female aged 25 who had recently completed a thesis in sociology of sport using content and discourse analysis).

Materials and equipment

In some cases respondents typed up their stories and sent them to the investigator as email attachments. In other cases stories were collected in an interview situation, using two pocket audio-recorders and then transcribed by a typist using an electronic transcribing machine.

Procedure

Letters were sent out to a pool of potential informants in several waves describing the research and asking if they had a story to contribute. Additionally they were invited to circulate the letter to other colleagues or acquaintances who might be possible contributors. Those who were initially approached were identified as those who had worked in or who currently worked in organisations that had several layers of management.

Potential informants were told that the investigator was interested in the study of power and powerlessness in influencing others and the phenomenon of

resistance to change. They were told that the investigator was seeking to collect a series of stories of *games* or tricks that people had actually used in the work situation to influence changes and decisions that they would otherwise have been powerless to influence. An example was provided. Informants were asked if they had ever been party to such a trick or game, and if they would volunteer their stories to the investigator.

On the premise that *the accumulation of evidence kicks down the null hypothesis*, and that a piece of research can be repeated so as to add to that accumulation, and additionally because collection of stories could lead to an enormous amount of qualitative data to digest, it was proposed to initially collect just ten stories. Potential respondents were approached in succession until ten stories had been collected. It was expected that some informants might have more than one story to tell.

There was no need to withhold any information from any participants regarding this research. All participants were assured that their data would be entirely confidential. There was no need for any names or organisations to be identifiable for any purpose. Hence data collection did not seek these. There was no intention to analyze data on demographic or organisational variables.

Procedure for treatment of results: Copies of each story were supplied to coders. Their first task was to become familiar with the stories and to identify any repeated stories from different sources.

There were two stages to the analysis. In the first stage the three coders independently content analyzed and made sense of the stories. In the second stage a Nominal-Group-type workshop was used to congregate the individual data and arrive at a mutual summarization.

Individual coder analysis of the stories used two methods both with a foundation influence from Personal Construct Psychology:

Step One: Within-stories analysis.

In order to optimize familiarity with the stories, a within-stories analysis took place using an adapted hybrid of Self Characterization story analysis (Kelly 1955). The procedure used was a shortened and adapted version of that demonstrated by Caputi (1997), and it is acknowledged that this may not be similar to others' experiences of self characterization..

Coders were provided with transcripts of the ten stories. Each transcript had been divided into thirds – a beginning, a middle and an end. First, having read the story and made oneself familiar with it, the coders were asked to focus on *factors that facilitated the attempts to influence others, to gain voice and/or overcome resistance to change* and to:

- Identify whether there was one main theme or many themes. They were asked to list them and if possible also list the contrast of the themes (in order to produce a bi-polar construct-type of response).
- The coders then read the first sentence as if that was all there was. They were to identify what was expressed in this sentence. What message did they receive from this one sentence?
- They then did the same with the very last sentence, as if it was all there was.
- The coders were requested to consider the story broken, into **beginning**, **middle** and **end**. They were asked to:
 - Identify a way that the **beginning** was different from the middle and the end.
 - Identify a way that the **middle** was different from the beginning and the end.
 - Identify a way that the end was different from the middle and the beginning?
- The coders then focused attention on selected sentences in each of the one-third sections of the stories.

- Coders were to take a highlighting pen and as they read the sentence aloud, highlight the words that they stressed or emphasized.
- Coders then took a different coloured highlighting pen and highlighted different words in the sentence. They then read the sentence again, this time placing emphasis on the newly highlighted words. They were to record any difference they noticed concerning the message they received from reading the sentence in two different ways.
- The coders were invited to repeat the procedure with a third colour of highlighting pen if they wished and/or repeat this procedure with several other sentences.
- Finally the coders were asked to attempt to synthesize all the understanding they had gathered into a brief statement (no more than 4 or 5 sentences).

Step Two: Between-Stories analysis.

Repertory Grid Technique (Kelly 1995) was used to carry out a between stories analysis. When familiar with the stories following within-stories analysis, constructs concerning influential features of the stories were elicited from the coders via normal triad Repertory grid method. The coders were asked to compare and contrast the element stories *in terms of factors that facilitated the attempts to influence others, to gain voice and/or overcome resistance to change*. A maximum of ten constructs was sought.

The data was subject to principal components analysis largely to identify equivalence of constructs. The analysis was also used to produce orthogonal construct space showing each coder's constructs and stories. It was anticipated that this procedure would assist the last phase of the analysis procedure – a nominal-group-type workshop.

Nominal-group-type workshop.

The coders met to share and discuss their constructs, categorizations and choices of wording derived from their analyses. Most stories described a stage where influence attempts had been resisted followed by the use of a different influence tactic to overcome the resistance. Because of a change in tactic to include stories that described *hitting one's head against a brick-wall*, in this phase the focus of attention changed slightly. Coders produced two columns of information derived from their analyses of the stories to date. In one column they recorded reasons why they believed the influence attempts described in the stories had been successful. In the other column they recorded reasons why they believed influence attempts had been unsuccessful.

These sheets of information were then circulated among the three coders who examined the responses for commonality and also for stand-out responses unique to one coder but deemed important to the results. These were discussed and debated for their salience and, by agreement recorded.

Also at this workshop the coders discussed their impressions of the adequacy of the analysis procedure used.

Results

In some cases the story-teller represented a wider group that they worked for while in other cases they told a story about oneself, alone. Where reference is made, below, to an *influencer* this might represent the story teller alone or the group with whom they worked.

Most of the stories followed a similar pattern with sub-stories amidst the main story. Most commenced with an initial story about *either* an attempt to influence a target person that was failing to meet with success *or* a person in a more authoritative position blockading the suggestions of the influencer. This phase of

each story was referred to generally by the coders as *hitting your head against a brick-wall* and seemed to occur most often when influencers attempted to use *proper channels*. This phase of each story also frequently highlighted the *egotism* of the blockading person and their *high need for status*.

Most stories then shifted into a sub-story about the use of a tactic employed to overcome the brick-wall and lead to successful influence. Many of the stories ended with either a triumphant announcement of success or a type of post-script indicating downstream consequences following the success (such as - the influence was successful and so was its implementation, but shortly afterwards the story-teller lost their job or left the organisation frustrated and discouraged).

Stories ranged in length from only several sentences to almost 2 pages of typed transcription. *A brief summary* of each story is provided in Appendix A. The coders' identification of *reasons why influence tactics were successful* are reported below followed by the coders' identification of *reasons why story-tellers had met a brick wall* in their attempts to influence. This section is followed by the coders' evaluation of *the adequacy of the analysis method* and finally a section concerning *other points of interest* raised by the coders.

Reasons the influence attempt was successful. Successful tactics.

The three coders identified and agreed upon the following principal reasons why the influence attempts had been successful.

In a number of the cases the targets were unaware that they were being subject to an influence attempt, and hence this precluded attempts by the targets to counter-act the attempt or to engage in psychological reactance.

It was apparent in a number of cases that the influencer allowed the target to take credit for the change that occurred thus enabling the target to gain the

recognition. By use of this tactic the influencers were appealing to the *high need for status* that was evident among many of the targets. Often the influencer was so committed to their idea that they did not care who got the credit for it.

In a few of the stories the influencers used expert jargon that bamboozled and baffled the target. Related to this, the coders agreed that the stories provided some evidence that gobbledegook does work if the initial use of reasoning and logic did not succeed.

In a few of these stories the influencer used a third-party to carry the message and to do the influencing. This implied in turn the need for lobbying with the third-party and was deemed a reason for successful influence.

The use of the informal network (as opposed to formal channels) contributed to successful influence.

In some cases the influencers protected an idea that was precious to them, by introducing extraneous factors that distracted the target away from it. This distraction tactic was deemed to be a factor that led to successful influence.

Reasons why blockading, ignoring or resisting change occurred.

This part of the analysis was mainly derived from those preliminary sections of the stories that described *hitting one's head against a brick wall*. The coders identified the following as the principal reasons.

There was often a *gatekeeper* within the proper channels who blocked the normally accepted flow of information. This enabled the gatekeeper to have *control of the agenda* – control of what came up for discussion, when and in what context.

In many of the cases there was a *them versus us* competitive relationship between the story-teller's group and those blockading their suggestions.

The egotism of the blockade person and hence their *high need for status* led them to become gatekeepers. Their egotism also led them to arrogantly believe that *they knew best* and hence acted dismissively.

The blockade or target person(s) had hidden or other agenda that at the beginning the story-teller was unaware of. Critical information was not made public.

The influencer and the target often perceived the issue at stake in terms of different outcome measures. For example, the influencer viewed the outcome in terms of *people helped* – versus – the target who viewed the outcome in terms of *cost in dollars*.

Adequacy of the analysis method.

There was high agreement among the three coders regarding their impressions of the analysis method used.

First, the coders reported that during the within stories analyses they all found the *beginning, middle and end* exercise very difficult and perhaps a little pointless. In nearly all cases the stories followed the same pattern whereby the beginning *set the scene*, the middle described *the process* and the end described *the outcome*. The coders found this part of the analysis especially difficult with long stories.

One coder found that the *beginning-middle-end* exercise was easier if each section was summarized down to key points first. The other coders agreed that this would have helped them.

The coders (including the investigator who designed the procedure) found a need to deviate from the order of within stories analysis as set out in the method section above. An example included doing the *first sentence/last sentence* exercise prior to reading the entire story. Another example included doing the exercise that

required emphasis of different words in a sentence prior to doing the beginning-middle-end exercise.

The coders stated that when they looked at the graphic representation of their principal components output (elements and constructs in orthogonal construct space) it looked right, made sense, brought everything together and that it had helped to have viewed and interpreted that output before the analysis workshop.

The coders also felt that the within-stories and between stories process revealed common elements in the stories that would probably have been unnoticed had they just read the stories in isolation. Again the procedure had helped, at the workshop, to identify the *reasons* for successful or unsuccessful influence reported above.

Additional points of interest raised at the coders' workshop.

It was noted that stories were received from males only, despite the invitation to contribute stories having been circulated to both males and females. It was noted that many stories were based on relationships between geographically separated offices/sites and where one site held dominance over the other.

Response to the invitation to supply stories was very poor and it took considerably longer to collect ten stories than had been anticipated.

The stories tended to identify a lower level subordinate as being the expert while management figures were cast as non-expert. Also many of the stories portrayed management as incompetent and the subordinate as the toiling hard worker.

As indicated above, successful influence was not always beneficial to the influencer. There was often a corollary to the story that led the influencer to be

persecuted or disadvantaged by management such that they soon lost their job or resigned.

Discussion

A stated purpose of the research was to liberate stories normally kept to oneself or circulated only within a tight social circle (Mair 1988, Rhodes 1996). An unanticipated outcome of the study was difficulty collecting stories. The response to our invitation to supply stories was very poor despite people reporting that they were well aware of such events occurring in their organisational life. It appears that stories of the type sought pose perceived risk to the story teller. This may well be a justified response when taken in conjunction with the corollary to a number of the stories whereby the story-teller either lost their job or was forced to move on.

Hence, contrary to Rhode's (1996) statement that stories are convenient and usually easy to collect, the current project found that this type of story was not easy to collect. Those we spoke to, both suppliers of stories and also those who showed interest but did not supply stories, stated that they anticipated it would be difficult to collect these stories since we were asking people to admit to having done something (played a trick on others) that they may wish not to confess to. One respondent stated "the thing that intrigued me about this research project was that it is the sort of thing which perhaps you might not get anyone fronting for." Despite pointed assurances of confidentiality and anonymity this did appear to be the case. This provides some support for Mair's (1988) statement that people are often reluctant to tell their stories possibly, as Mair cautions, because those who do speak out risk ostracism.

It is claimed tentatively, that the collection of these stories and their subsequent analysis may contribute in some small way to Mair's (1988) notion that stories may enhance the repertoire of imaginable and viable upward influence tactics that an individual might invoke. Some of the stories suggest specific tactics such as

starting rumours, using informal communication networks, use of a third-party to carry the message and baffling targets with gobbledygook. The analysis procedure revealed perhaps some of the conditions that contributed to the success of the tactics – such as the targets being unaware of the influence attempt, the targets being allowed to take credit for the suggestion, the targets being distracted away from the main issues and appealing to a weakness of the target such as their need for recognition and status, or their lack of knowledge/ability to understand the language. In accordance with Goldratt (1990) stories of alliance forming did emerge.

Early in the introduction to this report it was stated that there appeared to be many factors that contributed to suppression of change agents' voice, including management egotism, management arrogance, prejudice and unwillingness to listen. Of these, the results from the current analysis of stories supports the notion that egotism appeared to be a contributing factor. In the current cases, egotism appeared to be closely related to a high need for status.

As reported in the Introduction of this paper number of authors have now written about or implicated, management resistance to change as a constraint to continuous improvement in organisations. The stories collected and analysed in the current study frequently referred to occasions where a manager in a higher position of authority suppressed the suggestions of those in a lower position. The results therefore provide further support for the contention that resistance on the part of managers and persons in authority positions is a constraining factor in making progress and implementing improvement. The research also contributes in a small way to the field of investigation into upward influence tactics (Porter, Allen & Angle 1981).

Many of the stories collected seem to tell the tale of a person toiling to achieve organisational benefit hence supporting Schmidt & Kipnes (1982). Some stories indeed revealed the use of reasoning (both successful and unsuccessful), forming coalitions and appealing to higher authority (in the form of either establishing support from influential people or use of a third-party to deliver the

message), therefore supporting Kipnes et al. (1984). Exceptions seem to be the story of the accountant who used gobbledygook to avoid embarrassment and the individual who started a self-fulfilling rumour about himself.

Kipnes et al. (1984) reported that the results of studies into upward influence tactics were frequently contradictory. The current results found similar trends. Some of the stories suggested that scientific logic and rationale succeeded while other stories suggested that use of logic did not provide the anticipated success. It is interesting to note that even those who advocated scientific rationality found that they needed to resort to some other tactic (for example the use of hyperbole) to overcome obstacles.

The use of reasoning was reported by Kipnes et al. (1984) as the tactic most heavily relied upon to achieve upward influence. Goldratt (1990) warns that attempts to use reasoning may fail because they elicit attempts by the resistant target to detect flaws in the reasoning. It would seem from the current results that use of reasoning through normal channels was not a particularly successful method and did seem to elicit counter-tactics on the part of the resistant target. As identified by the story analysts, influence attempts seemed reliant upon the targets being unaware that they were being subject to an influence attempt and attention to the process of influence rather than the content of the message.

Case et al. (1988) report that successful upward influence is more likely among individuals who are well prepared, who are persistent and who touch many bases for support. All of these were apparent in at least one or more of the collected stories. These tactics were especially pronounced in the story about the planner who had kept district councillors fully informed and educated.

It was implied above, in relation to the bases and sources of power (French and Ravens, 1959) that ability to exert power might stem from (1) holding an advantageous position in the organisation, (2) personal characteristics such as eloquence or a domineering physique, (3) valued expertise, (4) the opportunity to be at the right place at the right time, (5) the opportunity to exercise coercion, (6) the

opportunity to use rewards and sanctions and (7) the possession of valued knowledge or information. It was reasoned that the converse of these would contribute to powerlessness. It is apparent from the stories analysed that a number of these bases and sources of power were at play in enabling a person or group to suppress the voice of another. In some cases, however, the ability of the influencer to overcome or also have access to some of these sources and bases seemed to assist them to influence successfully. In particular eloquence was a factor in some of the stories along with being in the right place at the right time. Additionally, in a couple of stories a person seemed able to assert influence when at least some role players valued their expertise and knowledge, even if one other role player was attempting to suppress their voice.

It was stated earlier that we can expect resistance to change when the proposed change threatens an important and valued part of an individual's life but none of the stories collected seemed to reflect the themes reported by Nadler (1987) – except perhaps failure to recognise the need for change. However, many of them do seem to support Robbins & Barnwell's (1994) statement that organisational resistance to change is associated with protection of power, control and vested interests. Some of the stories (notably "the paperclip" story) support Whetten's (1980) contention that a force for resistance to change is those vested interests who have benefited from the growth stage in the life-cycle of the organisation. Of the four organisational conditions that Katz & Kahn (1978) associated with resistance to change only *threat to existing balance of power* seemed to be apparent in the current stories.

Burr (1995) reports Foucault as stating that the structures of business and the way information is manipulated in business serves to justify inequitable positions. Rather than justify inequitable positions, it was seen in a number of the stories that organisational structures contributed to inequities. Most obviously hierarchical bureaucracies were at the heart of many stories. Additionally a structure of geographical spread where some sites enjoyed dominance over others seemed a

contributing factor. The very processes of accountability or requiring the approval of a higher authority seemed also to contribute to blockading behaviours.

The results from the current study and any conclusions drawn about power, upward influence and gaining voice must be treated tentatively. Only ten stories were collected and analysed. These stories emanate from a biased sample – namely those who were prepared to share their story with the investigator. It is apparent that many potential story tellers chose not to reveal their stories.

Of more interest to the current investigator however, a major purpose of the study was to trial the story analysis technique described above. It is claimed that the process of first, a systematic within stories analysis procedure followed secondly by a systematic between stories analysis procedure (namely repertory grid) greatly assisted the analysts in making sense of the stories and identifying the patterns of similarity and difference within them.

However, limitations with the procedure were reported. The within stories procedure was difficult to carry out with long stories. To overcome this one coder reduced the parts of the stories to key points and worked from there. The other coders agreed that this sort of summarisation of the stories would have helped. In effect the procedure did summarise longer stories to something shorter and of only a few sentences – these are the summaries of each story provided in Appendix A. However, it was felt by the coders that this procedure would have been facilitated had the within stories analysis been executed in a different order. In particular it appeared that comparing and contrasting the beginning, middle and end of the stories was most difficult and might have been more successful had it been the last step in the procedure.

In conclusion, it is claimed that the story analysis procedure was viable, but probably requires modification for future use. Additionally it was noted that the stories tended to follow a consistent pattern – scene-setting, followed by description of process and concluding description of the outcome. In future it might be more

viable to treat these sections as if they were *chapters* of a larger story, and subject each *chapter* separately to the within stories analysis procedure.

In summary, much of the literature on story telling reported in the introduction to this report highlights the emancipating intention of story collection. Mair (1988), May (1994) & Rhodes (1996) all refer to the intention of story telling research to enable multiplicity of voices and not just those of the ruling classes. In the spirit of this intent, in the current study story telling was used to enable the voices of those whose suggestions were suppressed. Indeed one respondent stated that he was interested in this research and was a willing participant because “I was intrigued to come across somebody who was actually doing research into those things that we never hear about and that we are never told about, but that we know go on in organisations.” The respondent went on to say that he had worked many years in organisations and knew these kinds of tricks and games occurred. The respondent had also received management education and training and stated that this sort of organisational behaviour was never mentioned.

Pfeffer (1992) advocated that we need to learn about power and educate people (both powerful and powerless) so that it can be used as a force for producing benefit, and so that it can be harnessed and countered when used to excess or in ways that do not produce benefit. An intention of this research was to contribute, even in a very small way, to the aim of enabling organisational actors to learn more and become educated about the use of power in order to enable a balanced approach for mutual benefit.

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Appendix A.

Summaries of each story.

Story A: Deliberate mistake. Architects working at a regional office required projects to be approved by a geographically distant Head Office. When the architects had design principles that were precious to them, they would include a *deliberate mistake*. Having discovered the mistake, Head Office would instruct the architects to change it and the rest would slip through. In this way the architects overcame lack of autonomy and lack of self-control by exploiting Head Office's *need to be needed* by directing attention to mistakes and thereby distracting attention away from other issues.

Story B: Focus on process not logic. In a health related institution, a significant clinical problem was identified and systematically investigated, from which a clear recommendation was apparent. Although management approved the investigation, when it came to decision making they fell short of using logic. They invariably balked at cost and went for a diluted version of the solution. Using logic and content as the basis for an argument seemed to result in group impotency. The story teller changed tactic away from logic and content to focus on process. It appeared that concern with process and what enabled a group to be potent, led to greater potency than what was actually discovered in the investigative process.

Story C: Creative Accounting. Just minutes before an important Board Meeting of powerful people some Accountants noticed an error in the figures in the Board papers and did not have time to amend it. The error was apparently noticed by a member of the Board but when asked about it one of the Accountants, feeling at risk and daunted by the powerful officials present, responded by using advanced-accounting jargon (which actually meant nothing at all). The officials, who did not understand the language and concepts, accepted the explanation.

Story D: Use of hyperbole. A scientist was working on a plan to reduce stock from crossing high-country ranges from one property to another. The plan had good scientific support but one local government official seemed intent upon disabling the project. At a Catchment Board Meeting, the scientist took a risk and used hyperbole and exaggeration to convince the official. The official conceded, the Board approved the project and it had significant downstream impact.

Story E: Being fully informed. A Resource Use Planner had held information sessions with local district councillors. Despite their decisions being informed, the Planner's General Manager

(GM) was unhappy with the decisions. But by comparison, the GM was poorly informed. At a meeting the GM challenged the councillors persistently, but at every turn his arguments were calmly refuted and by each councillor in turn. The GM had been unduly arrogant in believing he could get his own way; but well informed rationale prevailed in the end.

Story F: Use of the company gossip. Management of a company planned something special for staff at Christmas time – an additional week of paid holiday - but being protective of their staff, they did not want to make a promise that they might not be able to fulfil. Management officially did not want to announce the plan to staff, but because it relied on the staff completing all of the December work a week earlier than normal, management wanted the information to be known. They achieved the plan and its implementation by ensuring that the company's known *gossip* heard of it and by judicious use of the informal communication network.

Story G: Paperclip Story. Head Office and Regional Office were separated geographically and by virtue of this Head Office staff of one section had access to power. The people in this section were the stars of the past and felt insecure and threatened by the rising stars in the equivalent section at the Regional Office. For this reason they deliberately blockaded formal proposals from the Regional Office. However, the regional office wanted approval to implement a specific policy. As a timely coincidence a story was told in the Regional Office about a lost document that fortunately turned up attached to another document that had been sent to Head Office. It was decided to try a deliberate replication by attaching a copy of the desired policy with a paperclip to another document going to Head Office. The policy arrived back at Regional Office within a few weeks, re-typed along with a statement that it was to be implemented at Head Office and a recommendation that it be implemented at the Regional Office.

Story H: Self-Fulfilling Rumour. An employee of a government agency was sent to South East Asia for 2 years. He did not wish to remain there that long and took a speculative gamble that he could start a rumour about himself that he was to be sent home. Although he feigned ignorance of the rumor it escalated until he was sent home at the end of just one year.

Story I: Just Do it. An organisation had an unwavering policy to disallow use of a well known brand of database software. However one person in the organisation developed a programme with that software. His superiors in his work section ignored the policy and used the programme to beneficial effect for the organisation. However a similar programme developed by a colleague was

blocked when approval was sought using the *proper channels*. In effect, by disallowing similar programmes to develop, the organisation undermined its own efficiency and potential.

Story J: Use of a third-party. Two branches of the same organisation, geographically separated but in neighbouring regions found themselves in competition rather than cooperation. This occurred because the manager at one office (who we will call “Mgr.T”) had seniority over the manager of the other office (who we will call “Mgr. R”). Mgr. T was very egotistical and would dismiss suggestions made by Mgr.R without consideration. In one particular episode Mgr.T blocked a proposal by Mgr. R. that already had widespread support and that everyone else knew was an excellent suggestion. Mgr. R. lobbied with influential people who intervened, convinced Mgr. T that the idea was a good one, and that it would be of great credit to his status if it appeared that it was his decision. Mgr. T approved the proposal and stole the glory. He was never told that the influential persons were indeed working on behalf of Mgr. R.