

Produce to Protect: The Real Reason Why Change Initiatives Fail

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Abstract: This article challenges the concept of resistance to change and the normative approaches that continue to govern current organizational practices. It argues that the logic of, and conditioning into, rational economic theory with its quest for efficiency, performance, and results, is a main hindrance to change as it sustains an embedded immunity acting against change plans.

The research shared in the article shows that the commitment to “staying alive” in organizations outweighs the willingness to contribute to change. Instead, leaders and employees are caught in a quest to solve daily operational issues to protect both themselves and their livelihoods. The article presents research findings from two team case studies and draws on Immunity to Change, a framework for addressing obstacles in change processes.

The article contributes to the discourse on change by exploring how mental models, and discernment between technical and adaptive skills, can be used to collectively increase awareness, knowledge, and mental flexibility to succeed with change.

Keywords: Adaptive mindset, change, complexity, immunity to change, mental models, productivity, resistance.

Introduction

People need to get out of the hamster wheel before they can implement the new methods.
(Rød, 2020)

In this article, I challenge the concept of perceived resistance and the linear and normative approaches that continue to govern practices of change. Although change is a normal part of organizational life (Leana & Barry, 2000), literature documents that change initiatives can be perceived as a threat (Scheck & Kinicki, 2000), leading to stress and uncertainty (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Intended to increase effectiveness, change can be counterproductive reducing productivity (Bowman & Singh, 1993; Bowman et al., 1999), and causing negative impact on morale and work satisfaction (Cascio et al., 1997; Wah, 1999). Managers tend to blame resistance for failed change initiatives, while ignoring their own role, behavior and impact (Ford & Ford, 2010). I argue that employees' commitment to “staying alive” in organizations competes with, and outweighs, the willingness to contribute to change, regardless of the positive intention behind the initiative.

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The logic of, and organizational conditioning into, rational economic theory with its linear approach to cause and effect, continuous quest for efficiency, increased performance, and results, is a hindrance to change, as it sustains an embedded immunity acting against initiatives. Rather than engaging in the visible commitments necessary for successful change implementation, the fear of being incompetent or losing control (Ford & Ford, 2010) compels leaders and employees alike to focus on daily tasks, production, and effectiveness. The unconscious need to produce to protect oneself and one's position can be manifested in negative emotions and behavior, often seen as inertia or sabotage.

Management literature continues to reflect strategies and plans prescribed to address oppositional behavior during organizational change initiatives. This includes anticipating and neutralizing the refusal to comply (Kreitner, 1992), negotiation, manipulation, withholding information, and coercion (Aldag & Stearns, 1991; Griffin, 1993; Schermerhorn, 1989). These approaches are firmly set in rational economic theory where employees are considered means of production to be controlled and monitored.

In today's organizations, it is not sufficient to do "more of the same" through increased technical expertise, as often associated with traditional leadership coaching (Marcus, 2016). Rather, professional leaders need a mindset that can embrace complexity, and the Immunity to Change model engages our cognitive patterns to explore different and more effective behaviors (Helsing et al., 2008). Heifetz and Laurie (1997) made the distinction technical and adaptive challenges. While a technical problem does not require a change of mindset and can be solved with existing knowledge and skills, more complex challenges require an adaptive mindset. In terms of change, the implications are that applying technical skills to complex challenges is limiting, thereby leaving employees and leaders in a state of embedded, unconscious immunity (Heifetz et al., 2009). To expand and grow, the mindsets must be understood and evolved through adaptive learning, involving both rationality and emotions (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Kegan (1994) argues that to develop an adaptive mindset, we experience a process moving from a "subject" perspective where the problem "has us", to viewing the issue as an object which we can view and approach from a meta view appreciating the inherent complexity (Longo, 2017).

The emerging awareness that change is context dependent and complex, implies an acceptance that problems cannot be solved through existing organizational knowledge and skills (Dunn, 2020). Leadership therefore requires an appreciation that complexity impacts all levels of an organization (Longo, 2017), and adapting to change becomes a continuous learning process for the whole organization (Ford & Ford, 2010).

By highlighting newer research (Reams, 2016; Rød, 2020; Vas, 2009), this article contributes to the discourse on change by challenging established approaches and concepts, while exploring how mental models can be used to collectively increase awareness, knowledge, and mental flexibility needed to succeed with change. I firstly question the concept of resistance to change placing it in a larger literature context. I then introduce the idea of Immunity to Change (ITC) (Kegan & Lahey, 2009) as a method for addressing obstacles using examples from case studies in my doctoral research. In the final discussion, I relate my findings and arguments in relation to literature and practice.

Resistance to Change in the Literature

The approach to, and rationale for, change is determined by the thought tradition and leadership lens it is viewed through. To better understand how resistance can be perceived, this article explores the topic from three different paradigms: rational economic theory, organizational dynamics, and sensemaking in groups and individuals.

Resistance to Change and Rational Economic Thinking

In 1999, Dent and Goldberg argued that the conventional wisdom on resistance to change had not changed over the last 30 years (1999). The mental model describing employees as inherently resistant to change has been reinforced in academic literature since the 1940's (Dent & Goldberg, 1999). They suggested that the phrase «resistance to change» became a self-fulfilling prophecy of power implications where the manager or supervisor would initiate change and the employees would resist.

Originating from the ideas of American railway engineer Fredrick Taylor in the early 19th century, the scientific approach to management values rationality and linear processes where organizations become formalized structures to meet end goals and economic effectiveness (Scott & Davis, 2016). The same ideas, including linearity, fragmentation, measurement, monitoring, control and one way communication, continue to thrive in New Public Management as applied in both private and public sectors (Rød, 2020).

Despite the emerging focus on organizational context and complexity (Hernes, 2014), resistance to change as a phenomenon of rational economic theory remains the dominant mindset, where employees' production efforts are continuously measured and controlled. Bouckenoghe et al. (2021) highlight that parts of literature on change still views it as a conscious and linear process moving (parts of) an organization from one state to a new desired state communicated through visions and timelines (Kotter, 1995) based on a cause and effect logic. These structures hinder employee engagement and fail to tap into motivational mechanisms.

Kotter's Eight Steps Approach to Change (1995) continues to be taught in business schools and universities and heralded as a blueprint for change by organizational consultants. The language of actions and pitfalls assumes an underlying resistance amongst employees: i.e.: «When the urgency rate is not pumped up enough, the transformation process cannot succeed, and the long-term future of the organization is put in jeopardy» (Kotter, 2007, p. 1). The urgency in step 1 is also known as the «burning platform» and the implications are that employees cannot see the need for change and must be convinced by a threat: change or die. Other steps refer to «powerful guiding coalition», «create and communicate a vision» (Kotter, 2007, p. 1), revealing a need to persuade employees to join a change initiative, or as described in step five: «embolden(ed) (employees) to try new approaches, to develop new ideas, and to provide leadership» (Kotter, 2007, p. 6). The same step prescribes that any obstacle, including people level, can be removed. This approach ties into a preplanned cause- effect thinking aiming to establish the right type of intervention (Bouckenoghe, 2012).

Resistance to Change and Organizational as Social Contexts

In the 1940's sociologist Kurt Lewin's introduced Organizational Development as a management discipline, acting as a response to the dominant rational economic theory at the time. Together with his contemporaries, Lewin aimed to better understand the conditions of workers, and in 1948 the first research into change resistance was carried out identifying the value of employee participation (Coch & French, 1948). Whereas Lewin situated the concept as part of group dynamics playing out in energetic fields between barriers and forces, subsequent authors on change literature filled the concept with a different meaning.

Dent and Goldberg (1999) placed resistance to change in an organizational context, arguing that it is the loss that often comes with change, be it status, salary, or security, that people resist, not the change itself. Considerable research has also explored how resistance to change is understood and received. Carton (2004) sums up four behavioral manifestations of resistance to change which can emerge collectively, or in pockets, within organizations. The first is inertia as a lack of engagement with the change process. The second is the use of argument as a vocal discussion on the justification and adaptation of the planned change. The third suggests revolt as a reaction expressed through words and behaviors, and normally preceded by threats. The final form of resistance, as identified by Carton (2004), is sabotage. The behavioral expressions can be overt and/or covert, depending on the power relationships between the employees and those driving the change (Carton, 2004).

Vas (2009) takes the power aspect further stating that resistance to change is a factor with important implications at different hierarchical levels. Through tacit resistance, such as withholding human, financial, and other types of resources devoted to the change project, top and middle management can influence the change implementation. He also found that explicit resistance at lower levels in the organization can help identify concrete problems and address emotional and technical obstacles (Vas, 2009).

Hon, Bloom & Grant (Hon et al., 2014) identified three social-contextual factors to overcome the effects of resistance change: climate for modernity, empowering leaders, and supportive coworkers,

Resistance to Change and Sense Making

In the literature we also see a differentiation between organizational parameters and individuals' responses to change (Bouckenooghe et al., 2021). More recent research has focused on context, process and content of change, appreciating the complexity at work (Bouckenooghe, 2012; Fedor et al., 2006). Parts of the emerging research recognizes the experience of change as a complex sense-making process (Bouckenooghe et al., 2021) based on interactive interpretative, emotional, and cognitive elements. In a sense-making perspective, employees define and give meaning to change as a socially constructed phenomena (Hatch, 1997).

Through cognitive processes our human experiences are tried, tested, coordinated, and co-constructed according to individual realities, space, and pace. This process will then define behaviors and attitudes to the change. Like learning, change is a social process (Rød, 2020) where cognitive and emotional reflection and interaction are needed to engage the heads and hearts of

those involved. An example can be employees' sense-making of change fatigue as a phenomenon, and how it can be interpreted. Recent research (Castillo et al., 2018; Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008; Machteld & Michiel, 2021) suggests that change fatigue in itself acts as resistance, and the quality of employees' previous experiences of change programs can create opposition, and not misalignment, with the intentions of the upcoming change initiatives. «Conceiving change fatigue as simply resistance due to political, materialistic, or economic antagonism therefore misses the point that reorganizations alone have a lasting impact on employees' mindset» (Machteld & Michiel, 2021, p. 9). In other words, the resistance is not to the change itself, but the experiences of previous change initiatives.

The sense-making perspective reframes the idea of resistance and suggests that attitudes to change are social constructs that can be renegotiated, coordinated, and enacted in a continuous process of redefinition depending on how individuals and groups, perceive and experience any given change. It is therefore valuable to process the change at a deeper level, both individually and collectively as a team. This requires a courageous excavation of unconscious assumptions and limiting behavioral patterns (Marcus, 2016) and mindsets.

The Idea of Immunity to Change

Immunity to Change (ITC) falls within the sphere of adult developmental theory (Reams, 2016) and is extensively used amongst coaches and consultants engaged in individual leadership development (Marcus, 2016). It is also applied to examining individual contributions as part of overall team exercises (Reams, 2009). Next, we examine the concept of immunity to change and the inherent potential of the change model.

Mindset and Mental Models

To explain the importance of mindset in organizational change, Boulding (1988) used the concept of mental models, suggesting that these could act against planned change initiatives. Dent and Goldberg (1999) suggested that resistance to change has been viewed as a monolithic mental model applied regardless of the intended purpose. This is in line with rational economic theory where linear change programs are rolled out and theories focus on how to deal with resistance.

Senge (1990) describes mental models as assumptions, generalizations and conceptions that influence our perceptions and behaviors. An individual's mental model will determine what information they seek, make sense of, and respond to any given situation or circumstance. Using the word *metanoia* (*meta* as above and *noia* as thought), Senge (1990) points our attention to the deeper level of mind-set change required to learn and recreate ourselves as humans.

Kegan and Lahey (2009) point to the human capacity to learn and develop, as a necessity to unlock resistance to change. Whereas the rational economic theory, as described earlier, highlights fear as the main obstacle to overcome, Kegan's and Lahey's main message is that individuals, groups, and organizations are blocked by existing, unconscious mindsets (Govers, 2009). They use the term '*Immunity to Change*', referring to the body's immune system, as a metaphor for how change is resisted or avoided for the sake of self-preservation (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

Immune Systems

Heifetz et al. (2009) use an analogy of biological evolution to explain how we adapt to change, or not. Simply put, the DNA of a species gradually adapts to its continuously changing environment, by sustaining what functions, and discarding of what does not. Because the body is most comfortable with what is, it will try to resist new input trying to enter the system. A human immune system is designed to ensure the equilibrium of our bodies, by blocking perceived dangers such as foreign elements, viruses, and bacteria from entering. But the same immune system can threaten our survival by rejecting much needed knowledge and resources. The blocking could hinder our system's ability to develop and adapt to changing circumstances in our environment (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

Transferring the concept to an organizational context, we can begin to understand the implications for change initiatives. Changing can seem like a painful process to be resisted at any cost. In organizations, Heifetz et al. (2009) say a similar process takes place and the organization, regardless of how dire the circumstances, can be seen as immune to change. In order to create change, Heifetz et al. (2009) further argue that we must recognize that people will try to maintain the status quo regardless of the circumstances, because they are afraid of any potential loss.

Top management will find that the planned change objectives are not implemented as expected and argue that this is due to resistance within the organization. In contrast to rational economic theory, where change is coerced, *Immunity to Change* explores the embedded tensions within the individual or team system and how we can work with these in a way that fosters development, collaboration, and empowerment. Lewin's concept of forces acting for and against a change, remains relevant here. By exploring underlying agendas and intentions, resistance can be understood and options for moving forward explored.

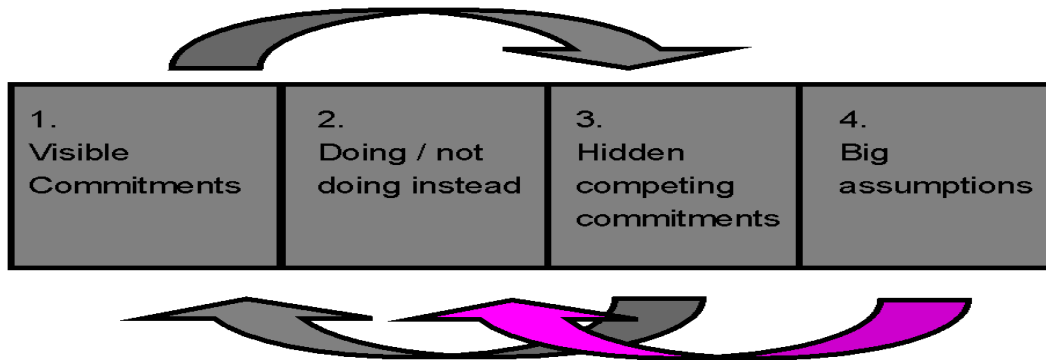
According to Kegan and Lahey (2009), our inner logics and beliefs can act as immunities preventing us from reaching both our individual, but also organizational, goals. To understand the underlying dynamics a few key questions are posed: Given that we are familiar with the planned change objectives and what is expected of us, why aren't we doing it? What are we doing and not doing instead? Next, we look for the emotions, feelings and unconscious thoughts we have towards the change objectives and commitments. By asking what is more important to us than doing what is expected, we identify hidden competing commitments. As we answer these questions, we also learn about our underlying mindsets, or big assumptions (Kegan & Lahey, 2009), which are the beliefs upon which we construct our approach to life.

The X-Raying Map

These questions are captured in a process called the four-step X-Ray model that enables individuals, teams and organizations to identify the big assumptions that run our lives (Longo, 2017).

A way of looking at assumptions in an organization

Immunity to change X-ray



Immunity to Change by Kegan & Lahey, 2009

Figure 1 shows the X-Ray process of Immunity to Change (Kegan and Lahey, 2009).

In the first column, the team (for example) captures their desired changes expressed as visible commitments. Secondly, the team discusses what they do or don't do instead of completing the visible commitments. When working through the third column, the team identifies how they have been simultaneously preventing change by protecting themselves from the dangers they unconsciously perceive would accompany those changes. In the fourth column, the team identifies their underlying or unconscious assumptions that sustain the immune system, the responses in column two and three. The team assesses the assumptions in column four and determine to what degree these are true or false. The X-Ray exposes the embedded immunity in the system, allowing the team to drill deeper for root causes and the impact of these on the organization's development.

Overcoming Immunity

Using the ITC model in his research, Reams (2009) found that behaviors that worked against people's visible commitments were powerful means of self-protection. Reams (2009) suggested that instead of forcing change or fixing the problems identified, it was more important to explore the nature of the underlying assumptions and how these maintained the system's state of equilibrium. Increased awareness, he argued, made possible through the application of the model, would shift the underpinnings of the system to release its stuckness, transform consciousness and support development.

Based in adult developmental theory (Reams, 2016), Immunity to Change (ITC) draws on Heifetz's and Laurie's (1997) distinction between two types of challenges a leader or employee faces: technical and adaptive. While a technical problem does not require a change of mindset and can be solved with existing knowledge and skills, more complex challenges require an adaptive mindset. In terms of change, the implications are that applying technical skills to complex challenges is limiting, thereby leaving employees and leaders in a state of embedded, unconscious immunity (Heifetz et al., 2009), resulting in failed change initiatives (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

The ITC process enables a subject-object distinction, where assumptions can be identified and tested for valiance. Through an exploration of an individual's subjective perceptions and emotions, meaning-making systems are revealed, and the beliefs and assumptions that shape our experiences can be questioned (Berger, 2010). Once our set thinking patterns, often governed by limiting assumptions, are surfaced (Reams & Reams, 2015), we can shift to an object position which enables us to grasp and deal with greater complexity.

Research Context and Method

As an international organizational development consultant, I had applied the ITC model on numerous occasions over the past decades in different processes, cultures, and contexts. I had found that the model enables teams to explore underlying obstacles and embedded tensions that prevents development. The collective discussions bring insights and increased awareness identifying what is required to move forward with the change process while reinforcing relational bonds and creating a common platform for the team.

Research Context

When I came to do my doctoral thesis on systemic change processes in teams, it was natural to bring the ITC model into the research. The two teams described in this article were recruited during a time when they had planned a needed change, and the team members in both leadership teams unanimously agreed to participate in the study.

The research describes the findings from two teams that I followed over a two-year period during their regular team interactions.

Method

The qualitative approach was based on Participatory Action Research (PAR), a method that advances broad involvement among participants, enabling and valuing the unique contribution of each team member (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In the process, participants collectively identify issues to work on and generate new knowledge on the same topics (Greenwod & Levin, 1998). Through cycles of reflection and action, new awareness is generated, impacting decision-making and joint action. *“Action researchers literally help transform inquiry into praxis or action. Research subjects become co-participants and stakeholders in the process of inquiry. Research becomes praxis- practical, reflective, pragmatic action- directed to solving problems in the world”* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 21).

At the end of each PAR session, we allowed time for expression and reflection, capturing the range of experiences present in the team. In the analysis, I drew on Arnold Mindell's process work where participants act as «information carriers' or «Voices of the System (VOS)» (Rød & Fridjhon, 2015), representing the range of diverging views and voices expressed by team members. The concept of VOS is particularly relevant when dissimilar experiences and perceptions of a situation are shared openly, allowing the team to develop a collective awareness of the different values, assumptions, and worldviews present within the teams (Rød, 2020).

At the outset of the process, team members shared previous experiences with change, and what they hoped to achieve from the current process. Each team session addressed an element of their desired change followed by reflections on the topic, implications, and learnings. As the research unfolded, the teams found that they were not achieving their identified commitments and we introduced the Immunity to Change model to explore blockages or hindrances to their desired change.

The approach was inductive, providing space and room for what would unfold. The following three sources of data collection formed the basis of triangulation analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Flip chart documentation and recordings from the groups working through the X-Ray model during research sessions, in combination with the researcher's own observations. This provided the basis for analyzing patterns and themes which was then presented in the form of citations forming the ongoing narratives in the two teams.

Case Studies Findings

Each team spent one research session applying the ITC X-Ray model. During this time, they reviewed their original change objectives, and identified and aligned the visible commitments in support of these. In the interactions between the participants, views were considered, accepted, or rejected. The findings in this section reflect the team processes as they worked through the columns of the ITC X-Ray model and are supplemented by a collection of voices of the system (Rød & Fridjhn, 2015) from the team members recorded during the sessions. By analyzing each of the four columns in the X-Ray models, I could identify similarities and differences between the teams, which I use to infer new knowledge about responses to change.

Team 1

The first team I engaged with during my research was a change project team in the Norwegian Police, responsible for implementing a reform program endorsed by the Norwegian Parliament in 2015. The project team was responsible for merging three former districts into one. Midway through the change program, the team encountered organizational resistance and observed a lack of alignment amongst colleagues. We used the ITC X-Ray model to identify visible commitments in the change project team necessary to increase engagement in the organization.

In the first column, the team members cited their *visible commitments*, which included the commitment to create trust, ownership, and improvement. The answers in the second column described what they did instead, included fault-finding, criticizing others, and questioning the purpose of the change. The answers also related to systemic issues such as failing to see the bigger picture, as well as focusing on production and effectiveness. The voices in the team, cited below (Rød, 2020), reflect part of the discussion when working with the second column; *what are we doing or not doing instead*:

The challenge is that people don't believe in the project. And then, what is the goal? The goal is to create trust and ownership over time. What are we doing or not doing instead? Finding errors, criticizing what is presented.

Table 1 illustrates Team 1 working through the ITC X-Ray model.

VISIBLE COMMITMENTS	WHAT WE DO, DON'T DO INSTEAD	HIDDEN COMPETING COMMITMENTS	UNDERLYING/UNCONSCIOUS ASSUMPTIONS
Create trust, ownership, and improvements over time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Find faults and criticize. ✓ Distancing oneself: "this does not concern me." ✓ We rationalize: "why change something that is working well, we don't see the need for change". ✓ We rationalize that operational policing does not look beyond their own function-they are only concerned with production issues. ✓ We carry on with business as usual, with what is familiar to us. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We are also committed to protecting our own role and position. ✓ We are also committed to protecting ourselves from competitors. ✓ We are also committed to believing we are so unique. ✓ We are also committed not to challenge a hierarchical organization. ✓ We are also committed to protecting our extensive degree of ownership and silos. ✓ We are also committed to protecting a large degree of autonomy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We each believe: "No one else can perform to my level." ✓ We each assume: "This does not concern me, it is something the central office is doing". ✓ We each assume: "This leads to a reduction of control and influence of my area/function." ✓ We each assume: "The quality of my function will be reduced as a consequence of the whole reform change program."

The answers in the third column *hidden competing commitments*, centered around personal feelings such as protecting one's job and own position, commitment to being unique and autonomous, experiencing limitation of hierarchical structures, and silo-thinking. The essence of this was expressed by some voices in the team (Rød, 2020):

But what is it that gets in the way of the goal? I feel a bit guilty with a lack of self-awareness and not widening my perspective. In a way, we are afraid of not being competent enough. Are people so afraid of their own positions? There are turf wars. And then, probably, the hierarchy has something to say. It's a pretty tight hierarchy in the police. There are not all places you should come and speak openly. But I also think there is something about the enormous commitment for your subject area, right? There are high ambitions and commitment, which are positive things, but we see that after all, they become hindrances to thinking bigger, because you are so concerned about your subject.

Commitments to performance and production revealed an implicit way of staying safe. Herein lies the systemic immunity, as echoed from voices in the team (Rød, 2020):

I think that many people distanced themselves. That complacency prevents us from seeing the need to develop. But is it because then we have a lack of self-awareness? But it is also about lack of improvement over time... we work very much in the hamster wheel. So, we do not widen our perspective. It has to do with ownership, right? So, improvement over time has to do with understanding where we are, both in society and other interactions.

The final column, *underlying/unconscious assumptions*, surfaced personal feelings around job performance such as: 'the change does not concern me,' 'I lose control,' and worries about reduction of quality. Voices in the team captured this sentiment (Rød, 2020):

Underlying unconscious assumptions that hinder us, what is it that makes us find mistakes we then criticize? Perhaps the change is not professionally justified, for example. It is because we believe that we are so unique and so great ourselves. Can it be a fear that my subject area is under attack and that you have a very high level of ambition on your own behalf? What about my career? Because, let's say I want to create confidence in ownership and improvement over time ... what underlying assumptions prevent us from achieving this?

As the team members openly shared their experiences, they kept referring to the needs of people within the police organization. The project leader claimed the focus on production and completing work packages meant that the new district's top management had missed the point. The focus on linear processes and hierarchy had become a bottleneck for ideas and initiatives and led to a culture of self-protection. The findings showed that the reform program was failing to engage people emotionally. The project leader suggested that the District Chief of Police could use the ITC exercise to address the real issues and get the project back on track. Unfortunately, this was not followed up, key people were marginalized, resigned, or resorted to long term sick leave. The change project, with the hallmarks of rational economic theory, was later criticized for not having met its objectives, too much micro-management with a bias towards administrative routines and weak decision-making processes (DFØ, 2021)

Team 2

Team 2 was the leadership team of a privately-owned organization, with a portfolio of social care services serving both private and public sectors. The team had identified their objectives to the change process, but despite assigning tasks and committing to action plans, there was little progress. Using the ITC X-Ray model, the team explored blockages to their change objectives, here captured as visible commitments.

Table 2 illustrates Team 2 working through the ITC X-Ray model.

VISIBLE COMMITMENTS	WHAT WE DO, DON'T DO INSTEAD	HIDDEN COMPETING COMMITMENTS	UNDERLYING/UNCONSCIOUS ASSUMPTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Develop concrete objectives to grow the organization. ✓ Create a plan of action to achieve objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We generalize instead of being specific, to ensure a certain degree of success. ✓ We prioritize the daily running of the business, instead of driving innovation. ✓ Fragmentation: we do our separate things. ✓ We don't take responsibility. ✓ We don't follow through sufficiently on tasks we have taken on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We are also committed to never feeling we are compromising our high-quality standards for the work we do. ✓ We are also committed to challenging our own objectives. ✓ We are also committed to not having to set aside time to be innovative. ✓ We are also committed to never having to coordinate our different approaches to work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Innovation requires surplus energy, and it is better just to postpone (take the easy way out). ✓ Everything that is ahead of us can be post-phoned. ✓ "I will fail (others have better ideas than me). My ideas are stupid." ✓ "If I discuss new ideas and with others, I will look stupid."

The *visible commitments* in the first column were to develop concrete objectives to grow the organization, supported by a plan of action to achieve these objectives. Moving to the second column, *what we do or don't do instead*, the ITC X-Ray showed that routine tasks and the daily running of the business were prioritized. In addition, there was a lack of responsibility and follow-through on joint initiatives, as team members preferred to work on separate, independent issues. The *hidden commitments* column revealed a lack of belief in their common goals, a lack of time and focus, and different approaches to work, as expressed by some of the voices in the team (Rød, 2020):

Some of you set such high standards for what we are going to do so we don't get around to it. Different approaches to work, solutions, and prioritization prevent us from setting time aside to be innovative. People also refrain from taking on responsibility to get things done, and we don't follow up. There doesn't seem to be a structure to how we work.

While discussing the underlying assumptions, it became apparent that developing ideas and innovation required a surplus of energy, so postponing activities developed to support the commitments was an easy way out. There was also a lack of understanding of, and focus on, the overall objectives. The ITC X-Ray showed that routine tasks were prioritized because bigger changes required adaptive learning which in turn demanded more conscious focus and attention.

There was also fear about the reaction of others, and an unwillingness to bother colleagues. The reflection during the exercise created awareness around individual feelings and experiences and how these acted as barriers to change. The team members concentrated on solving technical challenges on their own, as collective problem solving was assumed to require too much of an effort in terms of energy, time, and emotional capacity.

Relying on their professional skills as social workers and therapists, Team 2 used the X-ray process and consequent reflections as a leverage to honestly address assumptions and underlying issues. The team members took on more responsibilities and the culture developed to become more honest and open. The two leaders also grew aware of their impact and worked towards a more collaborative style.

Discussion

In a system that expects efficiency, the focus on daily tasks and production, where we continue to rely on our technical skills, becomes a way of protection which outweighs our commitment to change. Although the teams differed in organizational structures, power relations, contexts, and change objectives, a strong similarity was the preoccupation with operations and routine tasks, associated with a technical approach to change. This would allow the team members to remain within their current frames of reference and rely on established procedures (Helsing & Howell, 2013; Longo, 2017). This may be a more comfortable place to be, not challenging status quo or exerting excess energy in engaging in change. Next, the findings from the research can help us make sense of mindsets and learnings from the applying the immunity to change model.

Linking Skills, Mindsets, and Responses

Despite being aligned on the *visible commitments*, intended to drive the change process forward, the teams were honest in identifying counter-productive behaviors. In the second column, *what we do/don't do instead*, the flavor of the words and expressions revealed both covert and overt responses. Kegan and Lahey (2009) argue that if our psychological immune systems did not operate to protect us, we become «*exposed to danger*» (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p. 50). jeopardizing how we take care of ourselves.

The *visible commitments* in column one are balanced out by the *hidden competing commitments* in column three where personal feelings emerged to reveal doubt, a need for autonomy, protecting self and one's time. The *hidden competing commitments* offer a sense of priority to what matters most, the daily «on the job» production. There seems to be an underlying belief that if we don't carry on with business as usual, someone or something will suffer.

The intended change process in the teams was derailed by many of the team members' commitments to production and daily operational issues. An outsider might view the behavior as resistance cloaked as inertia or even sabotage (Carton, 2004), but when exploring the competing commitments and underlying assumptions, the findings show the self-protective intentions behind the behavior.

The research indicates that a change process can produce a fear of losing influence and control, combined with pride in personal skills, competence, and performance. This is further substantiated in the expressed need to protect one's own role and position in the organization, and fear of losing autonomy. In other words, they are motivated by an inner belief and confidence in their ability to create value that is independent on the validation of others (Longo, 2017).

Team 1

Team members in the research had different perceptions of the challenge they faced and what was required. In Team 1 the *underlying/unconscious assumptions* in the final column showed a need for maintaining status quo, a distance to the change, and a strong belief in the position of the individual. Testing the assumptions for validity, Team 1 went through an open and candid discussion, the team members found most claims were false, and the team came to realize that a change was needed, as expressed by some team members (Rød, 2020): «*We need a more adaptive mindset. The fourth column is all about feelings*».

Despite the realization created in team 1, there was not room or time for the above insights to be taken onboard given the imposed contextual constraints. Team 1 was one of 12 change teams responsible for implementing a total restructuring of the Norwegian police. The technical issues involved moving all personnel to new positions, often new locations, providing new management structures and lines of command. Units were merged, some were discarded of, and new ones created.

All these technical challenges and changes have wide technical, legal and financial implications. Within an existing technical mind set, with limited guidance in taking on an adaptive mindset, the

police personnel were expected to explore new approaches and opportunities while following orders and perform daily duties. Adaptive challenges included understanding new organizational structures and finding operational synergies between all the newly formed or restructured units. It was building new relationships and routines, which required meeting others with an open mind and flexible approach. Within the given constraints of time and resources, many employees found the change too comprehensive, requiring too much personal change, leaving thousands of people in limbo for a long period thereby negatively impacting motivation.

The use of ITC could have offered a more collaborative and empowering process engaging hearts and heads of different stakeholders to ensure development and adaptation to a new world of policing.

Team 2

Team 2 started the research process as a group of independent leaders that eventually came together as a leadership team. Primarily engaged in production activities within the boundaries of a technical mindset, there was a tacit withholding of time a resource (Vas, 2009) and a preferences for working independently. The team's alignment on the visible commitments was initially hampered by personal agendas and time restraints. Technical challenges for Team 2 included pressure to increase their market position and recruitment of new, qualified employees. Continuing working the way they had, doing more of the same, would not have produce the desired results.

Several factors contributed to Team 2's ability to adapt. As the leader team in a smaller organization, with the two owners as part of the team, they enjoyed more autonomy and control of their change process. The organizational structure was flat, and the team was committed and proud to be living their espoused company values. In their field of work, they were also used to building relationships, exploring difficult topics and addressing challenges.

However, as they worked to achieve their objectives, they found that they had to think differently, employing an adaptive mind set. This meant digger deeper and honestly addressing the underlying challenges they faced amongst themselves. What kept them from collaborating more, daring to innovate and be open with each other?

Through honest and open discussions and the explicit identification of personal barriers and feelings, team 2 expanded their skillset: *"We need open dialogue daring to share our 'mistakes'. Follow up, evaluate, and reflect, identifying success criteria. Dare to fail and to share this so we can learn from our mistakes"* (Rød, 2020). The process required considerable vulnerability from the team members and enabled more mental flexibility.

Learnings

The case studies show that both teams were initially blocked by mindsets (Govers, 2009) that reinforced a behavior limited to technical learning (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Applying ITC in a team context can lead to a questioning of binding decisions made by authorities (Heifetz et al., 2009), and increase the collective and systems awareness of the team members, as with Team 1 (Rød, 2020):

ITC is a good and useful exercise which we need to include as we move on. We must not assume anything. I really want the interim management to have the foresight and be ahead of the game. We need to think of the entity and collaborate across the district. Responsibility is evaporating – no one seems to take it on. The Project Head Office is not able to pick up the signals from the organization. We don't do anything before we are in the middle of it. People need to get out of the hamster wheel before they can implement the new methods.

Succeeding with change requires the development of an adaptive mindset. This includes defining the type of challenge we are facing (Heifetz et al., 2009), engaging the collect capacity and systems understanding (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Laurie, 1997), and dealing with complexity (Dunn, 2020). It also involves a willingness to explore and understand personal realms and feelings around job performance and change. Both implicit and explicit responses to change (Marcus, 2016; Vas, 2009), provide an opportunity to identify and address hindrances to change. The ITC sessions increased the teams' awareness of their obstacles, be it power struggles, protecting positions, mindsets, or fear of rejection, and addressing these would potentially accelerate the change.

The ITC model differs from rational economic theory in that the process of identifying hidden competing commitments and questioning assumptions, develop a broader understanding of complexities. In rational economic employees are being coaxed through change processes, using an instrumental approach. As we have seen in this article, this often results in lack of motivation, inertia and even sabotage.

In an organizational context, the ITC model helps reveal several underlying dynamics on a systemic and individual level. Firstly, the application of technical skills to a change acts as a single learning loop (Argyris, 1977) enhancing current skill sets, but not evolving adaptive mindsets required to develop the organization. Secondly, the perceived slowing down, or even stagnation of the process, can be indicative of organizational confusion or insufficient skillsets to address the adaptive challenges.

The insights from the Immunity to Change model directly addresses the first step of Heifetz et al. (2009) framework of adaptive leadership; identifying core practices to keep and obstacles to remove. By mobilizing people in the first stage of diagnosis, we are more likely to increase collective involvement and produce sustainable solutions and actions (Heifetz et al., 2009). By taking responsibility for the problem, people become part of the solution.

When diagnosing organizational issues as technical or adaptive, it becomes easier to break the cycles of failure and engage in building an adaptive organization. Heifetz et al. (2009) put forward four elements to pay close attention to when building a long-term adaptive culture. The first is coherence between espoused and lived values. In the context of Team 1 there was little attention on organizational values during the change process, whereas Team 2 was deeply committed to living their values, often using them as guidance in their behavior and interactions.

The second element is competing commitments, as explored in the X-Ray model. In Team 1 the commitment to protecting oneself from potential loss outweighed rallying behind the change objectives, whereas Team 2 came to realize that they would not achieve their objectives if they did not change their mindsets to become more adaptive. To do so they also had to engage their feelings.

In terms of speaking up, the third element (Heifetz et al., 2009), members in Team 1 felt there was sufficient trust to speak their minds within the team, and therefore enjoyed fruitful and honest discussions with mutual support in the ongoing work. However, their experience of the overall organizational culture prohibited them from sharing insights or ideas with higher levels of management, even proposing to use the ITC model as was suggested during the workshop. This limited sharing prevented new perspectives from reaching those in charge also limiting progress. In contrast, the insights creating during the dialogues in Team 2 could be incorporated into the organization because the leader team had sufficient autonomy to act, and to walk their talk in the rest of the company.

The final element Heifetz et al. (2009) address is work avoidance, where employees concentrate their efforts on the issues that fits in with their current skill set arguing that the change does not concern them, and sidestepping involvement and responsibilities. This brings us back to the need of an individual to protect their position, not engaging in the change. On an individual level, employees will find and promote solutions which safeguard their position and skill set, As a consequence, in this state of immunity, the responses can be interpreted as covert or overt resistance (Carton, 2004). The immunity protects employees from the pain of losing their status, position, or jobs if they are not sufficiently productive in attaining set objectives and performance goals.

Conclusions

In this article, I have challenged the validity of the concept of resistance to change. I argue that rational economic theory, with linear and normative strategies for change and a continuous quest for efficiency, increased performance, and results, is the main hindrance to change. The logic of, and organizational conditioning into, rational economic theory, creates an embedded immunity acting against planned change initiatives. To cite a respondent in research carried out by Vas: “Resistance to change does not exist; it is an invention of management to justify its failures!”(Vas, 2009, p. 228).

Through research findings, applying the ITC model, I have shown how change can be perceived as risky even when teams seemingly agree in its necessity and purpose. The findings show that team members and leaders primarily engage in daily operations and production to protect their position and competence. Rather than engaging in the visible behaviors necessary for successful change implementation, employees and leaders alike continue to use their expert technical skills to solve ongoing tasks and responsibilities. Because the running of any operation depends on regular performance which is measured and rewarded accordingly, leaders and employees will perform to protect both themselves and their livelihoods. No amount of burning platforms, compelling visions, or powerful guiding coalitions (Kotter, 2007), can shift the embedded immunity in an organizational system. The literature on resistance to change, steeped in rational economic theory, fails to address the systemic expectations to efficiency resulting in employees whose sole focus is on productivity and results as means of self-preservation.

A change initiative should aim to anticipate the level of complexity and skillsets required at the outset, and calibrate these with current levels of skills and mindsets in the organization overall, not only with a few members (Dunn, 2020; R. Heifetz et al., 2009; Longo, 2017). The application of the ITC X-Ray model can enhance the collective awareness and address organizational, team, and

individual obstacles in a change process. This model enables teams to work with, and through, the immunity, to discern between technical and adaptive skills and challenges.

As the change process unfolds its non-linear dynamics in an unpredictable and complex context, it is necessary to reconsider the need for different skills and mindsets to reengage with the organization and avoid stagnation. The research shows that these include honest, relational communication, process, and dialogue facilitation skills, as well as courage and emotional maturity.

The ITC model constitutes a framework for employee involvement and empowerment, providing an opportunity for problem – solving, sense-making and relations building that can lead to more constructive and better-quality solutions, engaging the heart and heads of employees.

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