

Engaging the Dialectic: Managerial Resistance to Change and Innovation in
Corporate America

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the implementation of FREE, an innovation-based, organization-wide workplace flexibility initiative. Through FREE, the company experienced a massive re-structuring to how, when, and where work was done. From its very inception in the company, the FREE concept critiqued and criticized current norms and assumptions about work in corporate America. During FREE training sessions, managers, in particular, began to oppose and resist the rollout. Evident from fieldwork and ethnographic observations of these training sessions, a dialectic model of change fostered a dialectic model of resistance. Resistance emerged at three levels of abstraction: macro, meso, and micro. Analyses indicate that through the operation of these dialectic processes, managers resisted the very idea of changing work on a grad scale, changes in actual work practices, and/or the change agents. In addition, this resistance prompted changes to the change implementation process and FREE, itself, began to change. This dissertation suggests that resistance to change is rooted in conceptualizations of identity and representations of the self in and out of the organization. This work also proposes that resistance to change bears a significant impact on the implementation of the change, so much so that the implementation adapted over time.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Overview

In 2005 *Streamline Co., Inc.* announced and began implementing the roll out of FREE, a flexible work initiative unlike any other. At the time, this was considered the ultimate venture in workplace flexibility, allowing employees complete control and autonomy in work hours and location. With any workplace change, especially one as drastic and dramatic as FREE, power struggles, conflict, and resistance were no doubt on the horizon (Bovey and Hede 2001). This quote from Foucault hits the very core of resistance in organizations. The relationship between organizational change and resistance has been widely studied and theorized as a process of innovation and the drive to create something better, pitted against inertia and the desire to maintain the status quo. This dissertation will examine a case study of resistance and change, teasing out the more complex and detailed aspects of this relationship as they pertain to individuals, the organizational culture, and beliefs fostered by larger-scale institutions. This work will describe resistance to change as a process that involves individual identity construction within the organization (based primarily on status and power relationships), as well as challenges to that identity and to the organizational self (how individuals define their self in relation to the work they do and how they identify with their work organization). This research also examines responses to resistance, longer-term consequences, and does so while considering the impact at varying levels of analysis. In addition, this study will explore the impacts of resistance on such an innovative concept and process, comparing resistance to change with resistance to innovation.

The Problem

Although many scholars from a wide range of disciplines study change and resistance, many of the resulting theories and explanations involve only a surface-level appreciation for the mechanisms, situations, and organizational contexts that may generate or promote resistance (see Piderit 2000). This dissertation proposes a much more sophisticated and nuanced explanation of who resists change, as well as why and how this resistance is expressed, that spans beyond the current classifications of organizational resistance theories. Additionally, the current literature overlooks many of the individual socio-demographic characteristics (as mentioned briefly above), as well as hierarchical and structural relationships, that envelope this change versus resistance relationship.

This dissertation uses a grounded theory approach and case study data collection methods to assess and to tease out the more complex angles of change and resistance. The study began with formative and exploratory questions about what constitutes resistance to change, how it is expressed in this context, and how it plays out in terms of responses and outcomes. Mid-way through the data collection stage, I refined my questions based on my observations. The more formal, emergent research questions used for this analysis zeroed in on the resistance *process*, and the role of innovation in resistance. I ask: 1) How does resistance to change impact the future actions of change agents and the innovation implementation process? 2) What underlying motivations and social mechanisms might contribute to or drive resistance (such as power, culture, and structure)? Finally, 3) Is resistance to *innovation* something distinct and unique from resistance to change? How can scholars improve understanding of the innovation process

through the examination of internal resistance to innovation?

Resistance to organizational change, as is evident in this study of FREE, is a phenomenon that all organizations encounter when implementing new organizational systems or forms (see Bovey and Hede 2001). There is a great need to understand both what has occurred in the *Streamline* context, as well as other organizations that come upon opposition to change and innovation. More specifically, recent scholarship has not sufficiently examined the possible motivators and outcomes associated with resistance to change. Studies that examine change and resistance often take for granted the fact that individuals and organizations resist simply because they dislike change, when in actuality the operating principle behind resistance may be far more complex. Research emphasizes organizational inertia (Hague 1999; Huber 1991) and asserts that individuals and organizations resist change because to maintain the status quo. This literature does not delve further into potential mechanisms that may promote resistance to change, beyond these routine and obvious markers.

Secondly, the current literature on resistance to change is insufficient with regard to evaluating the process of and responses to resistance within the organization. As the review of the literature on power and control in the following chapters will explain, the scholarship on resistance does an excellent job of describing broad organizational outcomes, but not necessarily direct, internal responses. Although some researchers highlight potential pitfalls and unexpected outcomes attributed to resistance (see Flemming and Spicer 2003), little work reaches beyond this to discuss longitudinal impacts of resistance on the change *process*, realizing the consequences for the change as a whole. This process study of resistance over time examines responses to resistance and

the subsequent, corresponding impact of resistance to change. This research provides insight into how the change implementation adapts to this contentious, resistance-laden climate.

Thirdly, this is a study of an organizational innovation, adding another level of complexity to resistance to change theories. This research describes how examining resistance in the context of innovation creates an additional dynamic that makes the change more vulnerable to scrutiny and challenge, and thus resistance. As this research will emphasize throughout, in this case participants are not only resisting change but resisting innovation (for in-depth discussion, see subsequent chapters). Piderit's (2000) work proposes that resistance is not actually *resistance* but *ambivalence* and that this phenomenon triggers a process that is actually beneficial to the organization and to the production or implementation of the organizational change. In this respect, a proposal that *resistance to innovation* falls within a similar understanding of Piderit's resistance versus ambivalence unfolds throughout.

Significance of the Research

To preview research conclusions, resistance to change seems to be more complicated than a simple unwillingness to attempt something new or change the status quo. I propose that it is inextricably linked to the construction of individual identities within the organization. These findings suggest that demonstrations of resistance are the consequence of challenges to, or needs to assert, individual expressions of power and status within the change context. Essentially, the argument is that resistance is not about not wanting to change the organization, it is about not wanting to change the construction

of the self within the organization. This dissertation further theorizes potential factors that contribute to resistance to change within organizations, exploring not only the direct consequences and outcomes, but the potential mechanisms and driving forces that may foster and promote such resistance. Research conclusions also examine how these mechanisms have the potential to operate at the macro, meso, and micro levels, explaining why each of these three levels of abstraction presents the potential breeding ground for resistance to change.

In addition, this research argues that resistance has the potential to change the change implementation process. This study documents how the implementation of the organizational change adapted to a climate of resistance. In this case, it was not the heart and soul of the change that adapted, but the implementation process and the presentation of information.

As organizational scholars, we need to understand what motivates resistance beyond the inertia or normative-institutional, blanket generalizations. Understanding what motivates different types of resistance is integral to understanding this complex social process and the interactions (at all levels of abstraction) that occur as a result. It is also important for scholars to begin to examine other, indirect consequences of resistance. In this case, resistance had a critical impact on the implementation of the organizational change, itself, highlighting the power of resistance to change.

Chapter Two: The FREE Initiative: Big-Picture Elements; Process Description, and Training

The Larger FREE Study

As described in the introduction, using data collected from 2005 to 2007, this dissertation examines how the FREE was unleashed within *Streamline Co., Inc.* Data collected for this research focused on the beginning and middle years of implementation. These dissertation data were collected as part of a larger study funded in part by the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. The larger study aimed at understanding and evaluating new developments on the workplace flexibility front, and Professors *PI 1* and *PI 2* partnered with *Change Agent 1* and *Change Agent 2*, two HR professionals working at *Streamline*. This chapter describes what FREE stood in opposition to, establishing the institutions and ideas in macro, meso, and micro levels that FREE attempted to debunk and de-legitimate. In order to fully comprehend the complexities of FREE, and observe how it adapted over time, it is first important to correctly understand the characteristics of the change in context.

Background and Development of FREE

This initiative had been in the works for several years prior to the initial rollout at *Streamline*, and the beginning of our study partnership in 2005. The *Change Agents* had previously worked on a program that they called Flexibility Initiative (FI), at the *Streamline* corporate headquarters. FI involved developing some telework opportunities, part time options, and compressed workweeks, as did many of the other flexibility

programs that were trendy in corporate America at this time (Chermack et al. n.d.). Academic research (see Kelly et al. 2008 review) suggests that workplace programs that address the interplay between work and life often impact work-family conflict, which also affects employees' sense of well-being and stress. On the corporate side, companies were also concerned with how to attract and retain talented workers (Kossek and Lambert 2005); people who were often attracted to workplaces with these types of programs. Both of these considerations were involved in the development of FI. FI allowed employees to choose a standard schedule that was different from the regular Monday-Friday, 9-5 traditional, corporate schedule. There was not, however, any *real* flexibility in this "flexibility." It simply allowed employees to choose a *different* standard, set schedule, but did not allow the true flexibility to fluidly move between work and life. Ultimately the concern with FI, and with all of the flexible work fads of the time, was that the emphasis remained on a sense of permission-granted, manager-approved use of flexibility (see Kelly et al. 2009 and Chermack, Kelly, Moen and Ammons n.d. for review).

FREE

The *Change Agents* were unhappy with the results from this program. They were ready for something a little more radical and innovative. In fact, they were ready for more than a different set of options, they were thirsty for something that would change the culture of the entire organization, and hopefully the way corporate America thought about and organized work. The *Change Agents*, both HR professionals specializing in work-life and organizational change, were driven and motivated to tackle this wildly

ambitions feat and potentially uncover a means of actually changing workplace culture. Their goal was to create a workplace where each employee had the opportunity to take advantage of flexibility and to do so in a way where employees would not evaluate and criticize each other for working different types of hours and schedules, and that was not executed as a 'mother-may-I,' manager-approved time off as needed. As Moen, Kelly and Chermack (2008), and Kelly et al. (2009) explain, FREE was unique because it was designed as a shift in the work culture, and not a 'program' in which employees could sign up to participate. The *Change Agents* designed the concept as a movement to 'the way we do things now,' causing everyone in the company to re-think their work-lives. In 2003, they began to develop and unleash a new way of working that stretched far beyond anything the company had ever allowed and anything that corporate America had ever seen.

The main hallmark of FREE asserted "Each person is free to do whatever they want, whenever they want, as long as the work gets done." Essentially, this new initiative (an innovation among flexible work policies and programs) was designed to allow employees complete freedom and autonomy over the time and timing of their work, giving them the flexibility to fully integrate (or not, if they so chose) their work and home lives. Providing employees with strategies for using technology effectively (although not always providing the technology at the expense of the company), FREE encouraged employees to work during the times of day and at the locations where they could do their work best and also meet their non-work obligations. FREE dictated that employees could get haircuts, go to the doctor, stay home with a sick child or relative, travel for leisure, go golfing, attend sporting events, and other personal-life commitments, during the day, so

long as their work goals were met. This made the case for working during nights or weekends, really anytime that employees desired, as long as their work got done and the goals of their workgroup were met.

FREE: Challenging the Culture of Work and the Organization

At the same time, FREE prompted employees to challenge the current workplace culture. The *Change Agents* challenged participants to think outside the box with regard to how work was organized on a larger scale. Their intention with FREE was to begin to break down the idea of a forty-hour, 9-5 work week and begin to think of work as “something you do, not a place you go.” *Change Agent 1* often used the example of “if you’re on the planet earth (while drawing such an illustration on the whiteboard), you’re working.” Although the *Change Agents* did not base their arguments in terms of institutional theory and the gendered ideal worker norm, these were certainly two driving forces behind the FREE initiative.

In the white-collar workforce, assumptions about how work should be organized and what it means to be a good worker within white-collar organizations emerge through the *ideal worker norm*, the prevailing institutional expectations and practices (Acker 1990; Blair-Loy 2003; Moen and Roehling 2005; Williams 2000). This standard depicts a set of behaviors and characteristics to which optimal workers and valuable performers are expected to adhere. The ideal worker prioritizes work over family and other personal needs and is visibly devoted to work and to the organization. This is represented in long hours, constant availability, willingness to relocate, and other characteristics of the “ideal” employee such as attitude, drive, ambition, and unquestioned commitment to the

organization. In addition to these expectations, this standard of work is gendered in the sense that these are typically masculine attributes. Being driven, aggressive, and a go-getter, not to mention an employee that does not have family care obligations are major components of this standard. There is also an assumption of managerial direction, where managers are in control over workers' work time and work tasks, being responsible and accountable for meeting deadlines and other performance criteria.

This permeating institution of the ideal worker "stabilizes" "both the internal and external organizational relationships" (Meyer and Rowan 1977), and directs the behavior of both individual actors and their agency, as well as the organization as a whole as it attempts to operate within this institutional environment. Organizations and actors become part of this larger system embodied with the meanings and practices associated with what it means to be a "good worker" in the white collar workforce and where it becomes necessary for employees to demonstrate that they possess these qualities and characteristics (Acker 1990, Williams 2000, Blair-Loy 2003).

The standard of the ideal worker has several implications for the implementation of flexible work practices in corporate organizations, especially in this highly gendered organizational climate. Negative career impacts associated with the utilization of flexible work policies may also lie in their inherent contradiction with the conception of the ideal worker in the corporate work environment. Tradeoffs and penalties, such as being denied a promotion or salary increase (Briscoe and Kellogg 2011, Glass 2004, Manchester and Leslie 2008, Weeden 2005), incurred by individual workers who make use of such policies, may be a direct result of the violations of the assumptions, practices, and expectations of the ideal worker, challenging one's commitment to the organization

(Acker 1990, Blair-Loy 2003, Williams 2000). As the use of flexibility initiatives is typically seen as a woman's issue. In contrast, the ideal worker norm represents the antithesis, a masculine role that is committed wholly to the organization and does not allow outside domains or roles to permeate the organizational boundary. In this respect, women also face a double-standard and increased negative work outcomes when pitted against this permeating institution (Williams 2000).

Thus, even though the *Change Agents* did not frame FREE in these exact conceptualizations of work and gender, nor did they discuss their proposed challenges and changes in terms of normative understandings of institutions, these ideas were essentially the root and foundation of FREE (see Chermack et al. n.d.; Kelly et al. 2010 for further review). Whether the *Change Agents* framed FREE according to this terminology is irrelevant, as these themes did emerge. As it will become more important later in the analysis, they actually went to great lengths to avoid the gendered conversation altogether. Since flexible work initiatives are often seen as women's issues, as discussed above, the pair strayed from having a gendered conversation within the FREE training session. Although academics understand these gendered expectations as critical components of the ideal worker (the very aspect of the current workplace that the *Change Agents* criticized) these two HR professionals discussed changes FREE in terms of gender-neutral situations and examples, creating a flexibility initiative that focused on meeting the needs of all employees, men and women, mothers and fathers, and single employees alike.

FREE: The Implementation Process

The initiative was designed to roll out at the department level, where for instance, all of Marketing would adopt FREE and pass through the implementation stages. Several departments were in various phases of the rollout at all times as some groups completed the training and others began. Groups that were not yet in any stage of FREE were used as comparison teams for the Flexible Work and Well-Being centers quantitative and qualitative analyses. Teams entering FREE engaged in a series of participatory sessions where employees and managers are encouraged to shift from evaluating work behaviors (work hours, time spent in the office, visible busyness and intense effort) to evaluating the outcomes of the work and leaving it up to employees – in coordination with their teams – to decide when, where, and how they accomplish those tasks. Previous research examined qualitative data from over 150 FREE sessions to analyze how this initiative attempted to challenge the gendered ideal worker norms in this setting and how gender structured employees' and managers' early response (Kelly et al. 2010, Moen et al. 2009). Here I turn once again to ethnographic data from teams finding their way through the FREE process, observing interactions within the training sessions, as well as private meetings and conversations with the *Change Agents* during the roll-out period.

During five training sessions that lasted a total of about six-and-a half hours, teams were inducted into this new way of thinking and working and then endowed with the stamp of approval to “go-live” and begin “living it.” The FREE training process involved three phases and then several steps within each phase. In changing the culture, the *Change Agents* first had to introduce employees to the idea that work could be different. The big-picture themes focused on questioning *why*. The pair challenged

employees to first think about how work came to be organized in its current state—from the path to farming, industrialization, urbanization, and the offices used today. But the *Change Agents* also challenged employees to consider *why couldn't work be different, why do we work the way we do?* The introductory training sessions first posed these questions in an effort to get managers and employees thinking about the change, then the remaining sessions challenged employees and teams to think further about how they could actually make this shift in their daily lives.

In an effort to emphasize the results aspect of FREE these team-based sessions worked through examples and scenarios that exemplified a shift in thinking about work in terms of time, to thinking about work solely on the basis of deadlines met. This involved preparing managers to better establish necessary work outcomes, shifting the control of work time and location over to the employee (see Kelly et al. 2010, 2008; Moen, Kelly, and Chermack 2008 for discussion of managerial and schedule control changes with FREE). The shift from behavior-driven to outcome-driven measures of productivity attempted to shift the work performance measures from exhibited work behaviors, such as being in the office and having a lot of meetings on their calendars, to more outcome oriented means of capturing employees' work performance, such as meeting deadlines and completing projects (see for example Eisenhardt 1989's discussion of principle-agency theory). Critiquing each other and each others' work choices was also a focus of changing the culture. Examples in the nitty-gritty, team-based sessions talked about judging fellow employees for coming in late, taking a lot of breaks, and leaving early. These team-based sessions also asked managers and employees to get clearer on goals

and what actions and behaviors truly needed to happen in order to accomplish these work tasks.

The first phase in the implementation of the FREE process included getting leadership on board and then introducing the results-based theory to their teams. The *Change Agents* emphasized that FREE was a “pull not push” movement at the *Streamline* Corporate headquarters. This meant that SVPs and VPs of departments not only had to be onboard with the change, but they were required to *request* for FREE to be brought to their teams. When a department began the “migration” FREE started with a “leadership orientation” meeting where VPs, directors, and managers could ask questions and learn more about FREE and the FREE process before initiating the implementation in their employees. This leadership began as an informal meeting, more of an information gathering and idea swapping group discussion, however, as FREE developed, this leadership orientation became officially known as the Manager Initiation Session. It became an official step in the FREE implementation process, a change to FREE that will be discussed in subsequent analytic chapters.

After teams were on board with the implementation, the *Change Agents* conducted an ‘Assessment’ with each department before beginning the FREE migration. They designed this audit to facilitate discussions and gauge teams’ current attitudes toward their work. Many of the questions asked about relationships with coworkers and managers, satisfaction with work and performance appraisal processes, and hopes for opportunities with work in the future. Once the survey results were collected and various trends were analyzed (typically simple measures of deviation from the mean scores in the company overall and trends within the team), the *Change Agents* met with the

department's leadership once again to discuss the results and solidify the decision to go-FREE.

The Initiation came after these introductory leadership sessions, where the same information about FREE and about preparing for the process was introduced at the employee level. Early in the migration through FREE, it was easy to highlight the major social concepts and topics that the *Change Agents* were targeting in these sessions. Again, not designed or framed as challenging the institution of work or the ideal worker, it was easy to see the emergence of the institutionalized ideal worker norm and their efforts to challenge and debunk those institutionalized rules and expectations. The efforts during the FREE implementation process to both call-out and de-legitimize the expectations around long hours, overlapping meetings, demonstrating being visibly busy, and being constantly available, revealed the underlying critique of work, and even the family, institution.

The next phase included discussing the actual day-to-day shift in work schedules and more of what the change agents billed as the "culture change." Once employees and managers had been introduced to the ideas and motivations behind FREE, it was time to bring the implementation down to the group (meso) and individual (micro) levels by discussing how these changes would take place in their daily work and lives. This was implemented through two sessions, Language and Group Implement, where the goal was assessing the status of the organizational culture now, envisioning the direction in which the team would be headed, and then building a path to attain that vision. In these two sessions, managers and employees confronted what is currently not working, what was inefficient, and what was redundant. Through the guidance of the *Change Agents*, they

subsequently began thinking and building upon better ways of working that were more efficient and more goal-oriented.

For example, the Language Session critiqued the traditional language of corporate America that was used to make judgments about work-time and around how employees used their time. The session prompted participants to discuss the current work environment, and a large portion of this time was devoted to understanding how these concepts were used and aimed at undoing the knee-jerk reaction to judge others based on their time, thus rewarding long hours. This participatory session asked employees and managers to engage in a variety of activities that put them in the shoes of others. Language, as the *Change Agents* defined the term, was “any negative comment we make that serves to reinforce old ideas about how work gets done,” something that was widespread during the pilot of their FI program. What the *Change Agents* found was that individuals who were given different schedules during this program, were often judged (as examples described above indicate) on the basis of their work time. These judgments included statements about coming in late, leaving early, not being present in the office, etc. In addition to the judgment by peers, employees began to worry that they would not be seen as hard-working when compared to their non-FI counterparts and had begun to fear that they would be penalized and/or passed up for promotion in the future. During the FI roll-out, *Change Agent 2* had begun to call this judgment and language “Language,” and preventing this type of language and judgment, in companion with changing the culture, was a main component of her vision for FREE. Thus, the *Change Agents* devoted an entire session during the FREE training to calling out, discussing, and hopefully preventing this type of judgment.

The Group Implement (previously known under a number of different names) session built on these ideas further as it first addressed any remaining questions, and then moved forward with real life examples and practical applications for shifting how teams relate to one another and their coworkers. Once the Language and judgment pieces had been brought to the forefront, the *Change Agents* prepared teams to make actual changes in their work, prompting employees to consider what meetings are truly necessary, what repetitive tasks they perform that are not integral to their work, how often poor planning leads to emergency tasks, and other ways of potentially addressing inefficient and ineffective work practices. Specifically, the *Change Agents* walked participants through activities, again, that were constructed using real-world examples. They facilitated discussions about when employees would like to work, when they would like to come into the office, how to cross-train their coworkers to cover their work if the need arose, how to have conversations about work expectations with their managers, and how to get rid of inefficient or redundant work routines. FREE did not, however, prescribe a ‘how to’ for achieving this new work environment since the work and dynamics for each team within every department were distinctively different. FREE did aim to drive teams and departments to a new, innovative way of working and it did provide the conceptual tools and motivation to get there, but the rest of the work rested largely upon the teams.

After the Group Implement, teams were given the go-ahead to change anything and everything about how they currently worked as a team. Armed with new language, new priorities, and prompted to think and communicate in new ways, teams had 6 weeks to “live FREE” before the *Change Agents* checked in with the groups. The final phase included a Discussion Session where employees and managers had a chance to share best

practices and challenges they had encountered along the way. These Discussion Sessions were conducted at the department-level, including all of the teams that had migrated. This was an opportunity for these teams to work together and share on a more-macro, cross-functional level, discussing problems or issues, but also describing new processes and procedures that were benefiting the teams.

Beyond this final Discussion Session was little or no interaction with participants in the FREE processes. Teams and individuals were accredited with the experience and know-how to continue working in a FREE environment. Occasionally the need for a check-in with the change agents arose after this stage. But, typically, after the Discussion Session teams were on their own to live and breathe FREE.

Defining an Innovation

Since FREE truly challenged these current workplace practices and made an effort to counteract and de-institutionalize the standard of the ideal worker, I describe FREE as not simply an organizational change, but an innovation. What is unique about this initiative was that this not another individual-based flextime or telecommuting policy, but an attempt at a true change in workplace values and culture around what work is and what it means to be “working.”

According to Chermack et al. (n.d.) FREE was a unique initiative in several ways. First, FREE means a shift in control over work time, reinforcing employee autonomy and decision-latitude, especially with regard to the time and timing of work (see also Moen, Kelly and Huang 2008). Bailyn (2011) discussed this control in terms of manager “surveillance,” stating that the removal of the one-to-one administration of such policies

prompted managers to “discontinue surveillance” of their employees. FREE embodied this notion of releasing control and ceasing “surveillance” of employees. In addition to these norms of operation, FREE and the change agents also challenge the assumptions around where work needs to happen and who is in control of the work. In an era of already changing post-industrialist conceptualizations of work and management practices that challenged visual representations of work and mandatory in-office schedules, managerial control and employee constraint, FREE was another attempt at putting more responsibility on the employee and removing some of the managerial control (managers’ control over the time and timing of employees’ work) (Vallas 1999). The set-up in these training sessions also speaks to the expectation that work happens in the office, that it is a place people go. The change agents make a concerted effort to reify the idea that “work is not a place you go, it is something you do,” making the leap to working “wherever, whenever” much more plausible. Putting employees in the drivers’ seats of how, when, and where work happens and leaving the goals and outcomes the only aspects left to be evaluated removes the notion of asking for and granting “permission” to work “differently.”

FREE also challenged the limited availability of its peers. Typically, flexibility “programs” or working options not only allow the manager to retain control over the time and timing of work, but they allow for managerial approval of use (Kelly and Kalev 2006). FREE bypassed this trait, commonly found in complimentary programs, by allowing everyone to be involved in FREE. When the department moved to FREE, everyone moved to FREE, with the goal to eventually have the entire corporate

headquarters 'working in a FREE environment' and even possibly move it to the retail side afterward.

In addition, FREE was designed as a culture shift. As described above, this meant that FREE would not be termed a policy or a program, it was simply a new way of working. The *Change Agents* were well aware of corporate trends in managerial programs, often distinguishing FREE from what white-collar workers typically call the flavor-of-the-month type of program.

Success with FREE

Ultimately FREE was deemed a success. Through numerous scholarly articles, *PI 1* and *PI 2* have published findings on FREE that demonstrate the success of the program in terms of organizational and individual outcomes. These authors found that FREE increased schedule control, increased the occurrence of remote work, reduced work family conflict, reduced negative work-family spillover, improved work-life fit, improved time adequacy, reduced turnover intentions, reduced actual turnover, and improved a number of health outcomes such as going to the doctor when sick and increasing hours of sleep. Thus, FREE provided managers and employees a variety of improvements in their work and family lives. The organization also benefited in terms of reduced turnover, less interruptions during the work time, increased organizational commitment, and increased productivity (as measured by their own, internal measures) (see Moen, Kelly, and Hill 2011; Moen, Kelly, and Tranby 2011; Moen, Kelly, Tranby and Huang 2011 for outcomes of FREE).

At the end of our 2.5 year study, FREE was still being implemented in departments and the rollout was continuing. Throughout our observation period, we observed much support for FREE from managers and employees, and the company appeared to be happy with its overall implementation. We also observed many instances of resistance, where managers, especially, spoke out against the FREE implementation in the organization.

As this dissertation will describe in further detail as the remaining chapters unfold, it is these big-picture challenges to the way that white-collar work is organized, as well as the standard of the ideal worker, that constitute the macro-level challenges and changes. As the FREE training process began for teams moving through the transition, it was these large-scale forces that were first introduced and critiqued during the team-level implementation. Once the bigger-picture of what FREE was attempting to change was fully established, the subsequent sessions focused on areas where the organization, the organizational culture, and work teams could begin shifting their thoughts and processes around work. This brought FREE down to the meso level, seating the change (or innovation) in terms of groups of employees and the organization as a whole, also emphasizing the micro level, individual shifts that could occur.

Chapter Three: Framing the Context: Change, Conflict, and Innovation

The purpose of this framing chapter is three fold. First, it summarizes the literature on identity construction and representation, power and conflict in organizations, organizational change and innovation, as well as other sub-areas of organization studies, framing the context of this organizational change analysis. Second, this chapter situates this research within the innovation literature and establishes this innovation process through an organizational change lens, addressing the dialectic model. Third, this chapter examines resistance change, specifically, and sets the theoretical framework for my dissertation, concentrating on the potential implications of resistance to innovation. What this chapter provides is an overview of the topics and scholarly discourse that will later be used to establish claims and analyze emergent trends in resistance to, and changes in, the FREE implementation process.

Building Identities In and Out of the Organization

The Concept of the Self

Beginning with Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead and the symbolic interactionists, the construction of the self and one's own identity is seated in how one sees the self in relation to others (cf. Cooley 1922; Mead 1913; Baumeister 1998; Fiske et al. 1998). With regard to identity, the symbolic interactionists define the concept as enacted self-conception based on social interactions and positions (see Stryker 1980). Essentially, the self and identity is formed through social interaction (Mead 1932). More recent work on identity and identity construction is influenced by social structure and how individuals attempt to stand out from, rather than blend into, the group

(Cerulo 1997; Brickson, 2005; Sedikides and Brewer 2001). Cooley expanded on William James' original conceptualization and construction of the self. James' definition focused on the self as need-based being, developing theories on several versions of the self, for instance, the material self and the spiritual self (James 1890). His definition, though expansive and fairly exhaustive, even by today's developments, remained focused inward, with not much consideration for the complexities and nuances of interacting with others socially. Cooley's reinvention included the reflection on, and inclusion of, how people view themselves, as well as how they believe others see them. Through what he termed the looking-glass self, individuals construct their identity as an interaction between 1) how they want others to see them, 2) the judgment that coincides with that representation, and 3) one's feeling about that judgment (Cooley 1902).

Mead described the symbolic interaction between humans and their social environment, indicating that a sense of self is derived from one's placement in and understanding of the social environment (Morris 1934; Miller 1982). Bourdieu's re-elaboration of the concept *habitus* (originally credited to Aristotle and Marcel Mauss 1934) involves how an individual constructs of his or her disposition and set of actions and schemas for acting based on taken-for-granted automatic conceptualizations and impacts of their daily experiences (Bourdieu 1977). Thus, individuals in society define who they are and construct their identities around the group and how they desire to be viewed by others (Brickson and Brewer 2001), as well as group cohesiveness, conflict, and cooperation (Reynolds, Turner, Branscombe, Mavor, Bizumic, and Subasic 2010). These theories amount to an explanation of identifying the self in relation to the social environment. Here the social context highlights or censors certain characteristics as

determined by the definition of the situation.

Individual Identity and Society

Understandings of gender roles, broadly speaking, are critical to identity construction as perceptions and representations of masculinity and femininity are means of self-identification, as are understandings of racial categories (Bem 1993; Cerulo 1997; Irving 1994; West and Zimmerman 1987). In addition, identity is constructed through the performance of sexuality, national cultures, religion, ethnicity, as well as families, political, and class statuses (see Cerulo 1995; 1997 for review; see also Tajfel and Turner 1985). Individuals continually build their identities through their distinctions and differences from other groups as well, establishing what they are not, just as well as what they identify with (see Bourdieu 1991; Derrida 1973, Foucault, 1982; Lamont 1992; Tajfel and Turner 1985).

The membership in organizations, subsequently, is one other area in which individuals reflect on and compare the self (Brewer and Gardner 1996; Brickson and Brewer 2001; Sedikides and Brewer, 2001; Reynolds et al. 2010). Thus, we can easily see how identities are constructed and maintained both in and out of the work organization more specifically (see Albert, Ashforth, and Dutton 2000; Albert and Mael 1989 for review; see also Hallett 2003). Individuals may partly define the self in terms of how their own self-concept meshes with or reacts to the company culture. An individual may also consider him or herself a part of the organization, even if there is somewhat of a mismatch in values (Mintzberg 1983). There has previously been extensive research that

discusses the implications of individuals' self-identification with the values of the organization (see Ashforth and Mael 1989 for review).

Individual Identity and the Work Organization

Identities are also constructed partially through social positions related to roles and statuses (McCall and Simmons 1966; Stryker 1987; Thoits 1983). One theoretical implication then, is that identity incorporates work-related positions and statuses as well (Felstead et al. 2005). Occupational roles and statuses are associated with elements of status and prestige that are involved in defining the self and the other (Ghinina 1992; Khlegif 1985; Merton 1957). Goffman even described work as fulfilling a source of self, operating through positive and negative associations with work through role expression and role distance (1961). Increasingly today, scholars such as Doherty (2009) argue that "work is an important source of identity" (p. 84).

When individuals have a positive self-identification with the company they work for, both individual and organizational effectiveness increase (Brown 1969; Hall, Schneider, and Nygren 1970). At this individual level, individuals' construction of identity and self-identification with the organization, and the belief that individuals like who they are within the organization, has been shown to increase job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and reduce turnover (Sims and Kroeck 1994). A mismatched fit leads to turnover and poorer job performance (Caldwell O'Reilly 1990; Pervin 1968). Likewise, individuals tend to distance themselves from organizations that do not match their own self-conceptions (Jackall 1978), however, since individuals do not fully define the self in terms of the relationship to the organization, individuals can

sustain work even when their values do not match entirely (Mintzberg 1983).

Much of the individual “satisfaction” in identity construction with regard to the organization is found within the status and perceived prestige of the job (Robie, Ryan, Schmieder, Parra, and Smith 1998; Weaver, 1977). With respect to this, much of an individual’s identity within the organization hinges on their status position within the hierarchy of the organization and the perception of power or legitimacy that coincides with said position. In addition, identity is impacted by the perceived value of job prestige and how individuals assess and give meaning to what their job title represents to others.

At the meso level, associations with groups in the organization that are purely work-related foster increased job performance through smooth collective decision-making, group commitment, and group cooperation (Jehn and Shah 1997). Having friends in the workplace is also associated with higher job satisfaction, job involvement, organizational involvement, and less turnover (Riordan and Griffeth 1995; Winstead, Derlega, Montgomery, and Pilkington 1995). Collective identity, which can be extended to the development of organizational and team culture here, is based on the collective conscience of the group and the characteristics and rules that unify the that team of workers (Cerulo 1997; Poletta and Jasper 2001; Durkheim, 1933). However, multiple identities within an organization, whether in an attempt to act collectively or not, can also be a source of conflict over resources, legitimacy, power, and other outcomes of social interaction (Glynn 2000).

Identity theory, at the individual and group levels, plays a large role in how individuals establish and interpret the “self” in terms of their own relationship to the organization as a whole, but also to their coworkers and groups within the organization.

As individuals continually seek to develop the self, they do so by making comparisons and distinctions to individuals, groups, and organizations in their lives, including their roles in the workplace and the organizations they work for. Research has thus far demonstrated clear links between *how* individuals construct identities, situate themselves and their identities within the organization, and discussed implications for mainly positive relationships. According to this research summarized above, individual employees determine their organizational identity based on their position in the hierarchy, the representation of that position (including power and legitimacy, see below), and how well the company's values mesh with their own. Clearly, when employees feel their values coincide with the values of the organization, the company also wins through less turnover, less absenteeism, and better productivity overall. Matching values, in a sense, leads to positive outcomes for both the individual and the organization. This is also true of groups and group work. As described above, friendship in the workplace and a sense of collective identity also promote positive organizational outcomes. Gender associations and distinctions (as well as race, ethnicity, religion, etc.) also govern how individuals construct their identity within the organization. Individuals identify and relate based on characteristics associated with these roles and the appropriate or legitimate behaviors and statuses that follow.

Jungian psychology defines the self in expansive terms, as an aggregation of the conscious and unconscious psyche. According to Jung, the self is the center of the total personality (Jacobi 1943). Although 'who I am' as a worker does not fully and completely define the self, it is an important role and does impact the construction of the self, both in and out of the organization. 'Who I am as a worker' largely describes the

self, and governs interactions, within the organization. Components of identity that are constructed through the identification of an organizational self help to define one's position among an organizational hierarchy and the importance and symbolism associated with occupational prestige (both in and out of the organization).

Power and Conflict

Power and conflict are natural consequences of status and prestige. Power is the complement of dependence, wrote Richard Emerson (1962) in his seminal article on power and dependence. Power is also the "ability or potential to influence" (Fiol et al 2001:224). Both are accurate statements that describe not only dependence relationships, but also the capacity to persuade or manipulate, and both insinuate a power dynamic between two parties where power is something to be desired and achieved. Thus, one of the more attractive faculties of both status (the position in the hierarchy) and job prestige (the social reputation associated with the job) is the amount of perceived power that is associated with higher ranks of the two. The advantage here is evident both in terms of structure in the hierarchy of the organization, as well as having more a socially coveted and glamorous position within the company (Knights and Willmott 1989). But with power comes this 'ability to influence' that leads to conflict. Whether discussing individuals, smaller groups, or the organization as a whole, when one *depends* on another, or individuals within an organization are *reliant* on each other, one of the parties holds power over the other(s), and conflict frequently ensues (Walsh et al. 1981).

Power and conflict are routinely evident in hierarchical structure and are essentially built into such vertical authority systems. Yet, other social forces—human

capital, social capital, behavioral characteristics—frequently insert power in unexpected venues (Carpenter, Sanders, and Gregerson, 2001; Hutlin and Szulkin 1999). The literature on power stems from the agency / structure debate that examines relationships and behaviors based on the actions of individuals as well as their position in the social setting. In addition, the systemic, institutional rules and norms also govern and regulate the distribution of power and power relationships within organizations (Knights and Willmott 1989).

Power and Conflict in the Work Organization

Not only is power a product of and a mechanism for governing relationships and manipulating outcomes, but implicit in power relationships is also the notion of compliance. As Gideon Kunda (1992) described, “the [organization’s] ‘culture’ is a mechanism of control (p. 7). Thus, power operates at multiple levels. Organizations have power when dealing in their larger environment, individuals within organizations have power when interacting with other individuals or groups, but the organizational rules and culture can also enact a power dynamic onto actors within the organization.

Power and dependence relationships are evident both within the macro (inter-organizational) and more meso (intra-organizational/teams) levels of analysis. Building off of theories of identity and identity construction, how individuals and the corporate culture are situated in, and against one another provides clues to understanding both the role of power in relationships and in resisting change (see Golden-Biddle and Rao 1997). These more meso and micro expressions of power (related to groups and individuals’

assertions of power within the organization), I will argue, are critical to explaining change development and resistance to change.

Pertinent to this dissertation and the analysis of meso and micro level within organization power, is the research that focuses on culture and relations as a form of control *within* the organization. As individuals assert power within an organization, the resulting actions are a combination of individual-level characteristics and statuses and their relation to others within the organization. As mentioned in the introduction to this section, prestige, status, and arguably one's self-identification with associated characteristics and legitimacy, no doubt influence the enactment of such modes of power and control within the organization.

Culture as a Mechanism of Power and Control: Macro and Meso Perspectives

Here, it is important to consider organization-level displays of power and control, as well as those of groups within the organization, and eventually individual persons. Organizational culture, on a large scale, is a crucial component to power relationships. As Mary Douglas's work (1992) details, organizational culture is integral to the inner-workings of the firm. The constructed culture provides employees with the unwritten rules of day-to-day existence within the workplace; "it is the context of their work life" (Kunda 1992:7). Control through this culture structure within organizations relies mainly on economic control (Etzioni 1961), but also utilizes normative and coercive iterations of persuasion (Scheeres and Rhodes 2006). With regard to either method of control, culture is also how individuals are socialized within the organization as well as how individuals influence one another (Kunda 1992). Within the organization, then, are structural

constraints and definitions of relationships that are based on power and where power plays out.

Organizational culture also dictates modes of acceptable behaviors and actions through normative expressions of the culture in daily activity (see Kunda 1992). From an institutional perspective, culture is transmitted through individuals in the organization through the operation of norms and sanctions that govern what is acceptable. These normative aspects of institutionalized culture are seen as legitimate, binding, and taken for granted within the organization (Scott 2008). Failure to comply with accepted norms results in sanctions or punishments, typically through social correction of the faux pas or even official organizational sanctions if necessary. The point being that culture is a form of control, as Kunda writes, in that it provides the model for acting and behaving and has the ability to correct unacceptable behaviors.

These normative and coercive forms of control, by which the organizational culture guides individual members and internal groups, stems from an institutional theory of the firm. From this perspective, culture guides individuals within the organization through appropriate behavior based on their structure in the hierarchy and the inherent legitimacy of their status. In addition, many scholars view organizational culture as a negotiated order, that is ultimately set and maintained by individuals in the organization (Hallett 2003; Strauss 1978). According to Hallett's (2003) use of symbolic power and negotiated order, legitimacy is found in the action of the individual and in the value that others place upon it. Here, legitimacy is created through the expectations and engagements of organizational actors, and is power is defined by the legitimacy of those engagements.

Power dynamics displayed and perceived within the organization therefore require a sense of legitimacy. Those individuals or groups that have the structural power, based on hierarchy, are in a more legitimate place to make demands, assess others, make their preferences heard, and achieve their goals. There are also social and cognitive factors that suggest that employees will strive to maintain control over that which they do have legitimacy.

Culture as a Mechanism of Power and Control: Micro Perspective

Building off of identity theory, it is easy to see the connection between individuals' own construction of their organizational identities based on, and interacting with, the construction of the corporate culture (Hallett 2003). Understanding one's role and one's place in the organization and the hierarchy, an integral component of identity construction, also demands an understanding of culture and power (Hallett 2003). Because organizational cultures help individuals not only to identify with a product or brand, as well as seat themselves in a social context, organizational cultures are fostered and nurtured in relation to identity construction (Albert, Ashforth, and Dutton 2000; Albert and Mael 1989; Brewer and Gardner 1996; Brickson and Brewer 2001; Sedikides and Brewer, 2001; Reynolds et al. 2010).

At the micro level of individual interactions, a similar, but distinct set of theories and propositions on power emerges. Structure is still a largely influential factor, as it is in the meso level theories. But at the micro level, I will argue, structures, exchanges, and identity relationships are the main driving forces. In fact, structural constraints and human agency far outweigh most structural and exchange theories (Hamilton and Biggart

1985). Mechanic (1962) would likely concur. He distinguishes between power and authority, stating that lower-level employees lack the hierarchical positions required for exercising authority, but still sustain an ability to achieve power nonetheless within their structurally constrained organizational positions. Thus, within the structure and hierarchy still rests the aptitude for personal power to be acquired at any level through social forms of coercion.

As mentioned above, power interactions based on hierarchy typically unfold as participants would expect. Research has found that subordinate organizational members, often conscious of their hierarchical, built-in, disadvantage in a given situation, more often defer and comply with their superiors' commands, rather than challenge them. In this sense, a lower-level worker, already keenly aware of his position generally avoids conflict because he knows that he would invariably lose (Walsh et al. 1981). As Cyert and March (1963) also argue, organizations have memory, as do their members. Thus, individuals learn and rarely repeat past mistakes where a challenge did not work in their favor. Using principles of isomorphism, Fiol and her co-authors propose that power identities and reputation hierarchies are transferred and reproduced (Fiol et al. 2001). With this learning and reproduction comes the ability to anticipate responses and avoid unnecessary confrontation (Walsh et al. 1981). Power relations also form mental models within individuals' understanding of the situation and in the broader organizational culture, often associated with organizational hierarchy, that reproduce over time (Foil et al. 2001).

Sensemaking, Decision-Making, and Legitimacy Processes: Micro Level Dynamics of Power and Conflict

Ideas behind sensemaking and organizational decision-making (see Weick 1993) also follow suit. Weick wrote, “reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs” (1993: 635).

Identity theorists that have followed in this tradition explain that sensemaking processes govern how and who we interact with, in addition to assessments of the situation, power dynamics, and the determined appropriateness of potential action (Markus, Smith, and Moreland 1985; Swann 1987; Brickson 2005). Here, individuals also learn from and make sense of the situation based on past outcomes and what experience dictates. In the face of a potential conflict, individuals will assess the situation (or make sense of what is happening) based on available schemas, which have invariably been influenced by past outcomes. As these identity scholars note, this also pertains specifically to the individuals or groups involved and assessments of how we act based on the other parties involved.

Legitimacy is also a factor in this individual, micro level dynamic, much the same as it plays out in the meso and macro forms of power relations. Individuals in organizations have developed a set of mental models to guide them through the workday, but the potential *illegitimacy* of their actions also helps them to determine whether employing the power they hold in the event of a contestation or the resulting confrontation may be “worth it” (see Cyert and March 1963; Emerson 1976; Fiol et al. 2001; Walsh et al. 1981). This question of legitimacy also then leads “disadvantaged” individuals to challenge the legitimacy of other peer employees, and undoubtedly those

above as well. It creates a highly unpredictable, yet often observed, situation where lack of legitimacy leads not to a reconciliation or avoidance of conflict, but leads directly to a challenge in an attempt to assert some type of legitimacy (Walsh et al. 1981). Thus, individuals, however aware of the current position on the totem pole, do not always make the socially acceptable, lower-status decision of avoiding conflict and challenge.

Walsh et al. (1981), suggest that individuals will attempt to exert power through enacting their legitimacy in whatever circumstances they are able to manipulate. This can be seen as a method for those slightly lower in the hierarchy to emphasize whatever power they do have when possible. Walsh et al. use the example of control over meetings agendas and agenda manipulation. More specifically, power and control are typically invoked at this lower-level, through control over information, organizational socialization (through culture and institutional rules), the control over content and agendas, (Knights and Willmott 1989; Kramer and Neale 1998). This is a clear exercise of power and control. Here, those who have some form of legitimacy can assert it within elements of the work environment that they can regulate (i.e.: meeting agendas). This, in turn, disallows others from attempting to add to or manipulate the situation. This is a more covert, below the surface use of control, but organizations also experience the more overt kind.

Change, Innovation, and Resistance

Theories of organizational change, innovation, and resistance also have implications at these meso and micro levels. Even as organizations grow and develop over time, there still exists a tendency toward structural inertia (Hannan and Freeman

1984; Kelly and Amburgey 2001). That is, “they seldom succeed in making radical changes in strategy and structure” (Hannan and Freeman 1984: 149; see also Hannan and Freeman 1977; Amburgey et al. 1993). Although many organizational theorists rely on inertia theories that keep organizations static, to some scholars, the idea of change and innovation is the basis for development and success. Two major themes emerge in the general organizational change literature. One camp agrees with the above account, that organizations are entities that typically avoid change. The other side that suggests that organizations grow, adapt, and indeed change, continuously (Zucker 1987; Barnett and Carroll 1995; Aldrich 1999).

Change and Inertia

On the first hand, *of course* organizations resist change (Amburgey et al. 1993; Hannan and Freeman 1984). Change is expensive. Adopting new policies or practices, or testing a new management style or administrative plan costs money. Employee training and re-training is expensive. However, change and innovation are important and crucial aspects to company growth, strategic development, and competitive advantage. Thus, organizations find themselves in the midst of two opposing forces simultaneously; the tendency to resist change, and the pull toward change and innovation.

On the second hand, theorists recognize that organizations do grow and change, both strategically and unintentionally, over time. These existing theories of change fall into two groups; either normatively generated, or based on the powerful actors approach (Fligstein and Dauber 1989). Generally, the former indicates that change occurs because of normative outside social forces acting upon the organization forcing it to conform in

order to keep up with its competition (Greenwood and Hinings 1996). Organizations become pressured to become increasingly like other organizations (Zucker 1987) and punished for deviation from norms. Powell and DiMaggio (1983) add coercive and mimetic influences to the normative pressures toward conformity. Alternatively, in the powerful actor's approach, change comes from internal actors' rational decision-making processes. Again, this stresses the importance of knowledge and knowledge creation in that individual actors and their decision-making processes are involved in organizational change. As it has also been previously described, this often leads to innovation.

Van de Ven and Poole (1995) propose four ideal types of organizational change; Teleological, Dialectic, Life Cycle, and Evolutionary. Massive organizational change clearly encompasses characteristics of all four, depending on the how one constructs and views the development of the change (especially over time and space) as Van de Ven and Poole (1995) suggest. Their Life Cycle model explains that organizational change that moves through consists of distinct stages and logically follows the start up, grow, harvest, and terminal movements described in this model. In the Teleological Model, organizations move through stages of dissatisfaction, search, goal setting, and goal implementation. The Dialectic model of change sparks with a thesis and an antithesis, prescribing some type of conflict, which ultimately results in synthesis. The Evolutionary model, as expected, is comprised of variation, selection, and retention mechanisms. According to Van de Ven and Poole (1995), an interaction of all four models produces the most "complex and sophisticated explanation of change and development" (p. 531). This combination of all four models considers change on an individual level (changing individual's work routines and mental models), as well as organization-wide shifts

(structural changes in goals and work expectations among others), and finally considers a population-level change such that this change is a reaction to and will no doubt impact the larger organizational environment. Van de Ven and Poole (citing Riegel 1975) assert that this multifaceted mode of change often produces developmental crises, specifically when a lack of synchronicity among the progressions exists. The dialectic model will be revisited later, and with more specificity, later in this chapter.

Innovation and Invention

Theories of change, innovation, and knowledge go hand in hand in organization theory. For what major reason, other than to comply with legal demands (as neo-institutional theory asserts), would an organization change than to renovate and innovate? Competition within the field demands that companies change and innovate. That said, it is important to make a distinction between innovation and invention. According to Hague (1990), an innovation is something new, beyond just a change to something different. Innovation implies that the change or desired end state is new and has not been attempted before. Van de Ven et al. (2008) describe how an organization innovates “each time they invent, develop, and implement new products, programs, services, or administrative arrangements” (p. 3). In a sense, innovations become the variations which evolutionary theory describes (see discussion above) and the modus for organizational learning (see below). Innovation occurs through a series of steps or phases of activity. Innovation begins with an initiation phase, then moves to a developmental stage, and finally through a process of implementation (Van de Ven et al. 1999). According to Van de Ven and his colleagues, innovation can come in the form of product

innovation, administrative innovation, or knowledge innovation. However, not all knowledge must be created within the organization in order for it to serve as a point of innovation. New, external, information can often trigger internal organizational innovations that increase the value of the firm. This level of ability of the firm to pick up on external knowledge is called *absorptive capacity* (Cohen and Levinthal 1990). In this highly influential article, these authors track firms' absorptive capacity and its connection to research and development ventures within the organizations. Cohen and Levinthal (1990) thus argue a strong connection between this capacity to capture external knowledge, internal R&D, innovation, and ultimately firm performance (see also Kirton 1980).

This idea of absorptive capacity is intriguing and exciting to scholars and practitioners. There is so much knowledge and information "out there" and the thought that all that is required of a firm is to cultivate it sparks endless possibilities and optimism. This success seemingly promised by a firms' absorptive capacity is inherently not always optimistic and not always endless. The ability of an organization to acquire this type of knowledge and the low odds of success with innovation through absorptive capacity is not in the organization's favor. Organizational lag is always a problem (see Hammer 1990; Davenport and Short 1990). As Damanpour and Evan (1984) find in their piece on organizational lag and innovation, there is often a discrepancy between the adoption of management and technological innovations. Thus, depending on the innovation, whether it be administrative or technological, a serious amount of time could pass between adoption and implementation.

Resistance to Change

In concordance with the organizational change (and innovation) literature, as well as the scholarship on power, comes the idea of resisting change. Beyond the concept of organizational inertia, a macro level force, resistance to change operates at more of a meso and micro level as individuals and groups take up arms against organizational change. This area of organizational scholarship considers organizational change within the context of internal struggle against change and explores explicit disagreement and dissent among organizational members, specifically with respect to management. Psychologically speaking, there is a tendency to resist change and within organizations, change becomes a lot of work. Resistance to change occurs for several possible reasons. Personality characteristics, having a stake in what the change will alter, bad prior experience with innovation, group pressure, organizational/political climate, and organizational hierarchical structures are all possible antecedents of resistance (Meston and King 1996).

What exactly constitutes resistance, as will be discussed further below, varies in the literature and there does not seem to be much of a consensus on the horizon. This is most likely due to contextual factors. What constitutes resistance and what is written off as a stress reaction differs on the situation, the change, and the individuals involved (Meston and King 1996). Much of the literature in this area has focused on managers expressing a voice against a change brought down from above. That is verbally and publicly resisting a change. However, passive-aggression can be a more rewarding path in the end. Raising a voice and adamantly opposing a change can result in career penalties. As Melanie Bryant (2003) suggests, managers who remained in silent

opposition did not experience the bullying, violence, threats, and career penalties that those who voiced a negative opinion experienced, and ultimately achieved a similar result. That is, in the case of Bryant's research, silent opposition is often just as effective as active as active resistance.

There are some forms of a 'silent voices' which are equally as effective as voicing a resistance, but are done in a rather covert manner. Knowledge transfer plays a critical role in organizational change and can be one such modus for individuals to express resistance. Individuals within a firm who are responsible for the flow of knowledge may simply refuse or neglect to transfer such information. If a manager is reluctant to move ahead with a change, he may simply fail to conduct the training or communications required of him (Empson 2001). This is a passive form of resistance but also quite an effective one. This position is risky as well in that gaps in the communication 'trees' are easily recognized and the individual responsible for the breach is easily identified.

Ultimately, the best way to change an organization is probably to leave managers with as much control over their work, their decisions, and their people as possible. As Knights and McCabe found in their 2000 study of an organizational change to TQM, allowing managers to retain some amount of control decreases a number of issues common to organizational change. Meston and King (1996) recommend a similar method which they termed, "organizational diagnosis." This involves 'taking the temperature' of the organization to see whether it is really ready for the innovation and whether the employees who will be affected are equipped to handle the changes. This involves a variety of methods for getting feedback and criticisms from employees *before* initiating the implementation of a change (see also Van de Ven et al. 2008). Another method for

reducing resistance before it begins is contingency planning for areas and topics that may spark dissent. The ability of managers to use a new product or to comprehend new processes that are being implemented, along with attention paid to their input and criticisms of then-new procedures, can all help to reduce resistance (Ellen et al. 2007).

An appropriate conclusion to this section is that, although organizations do change over time, naturally or strategically, managers must learn to deal with changes. However, organizations that heed managerial concerns and face them head on before implementing a costly and dramatic change, benefit in the long run with their pre-established compliance. Managers do indeed control information flow and leadership support does impact employee morale. And, according to this research described above, managers can and will address changes that they believe do not suit them or those who work below them, whatever their rationale, personal, professional, or political. Thus, having that management buy-in and support prior to change implementation can essentially determine, before hand, whether the change becomes a success or fails miserably.

Lastly, within the resistance literature, is Piderit's work (2000) that suggests that resistance is good. According to her work, resistance is actually a healthy form of expression and a natural aspect of any change process. She argues that resistance, in effect, is actually beneficial in that it promotes a dialogue that fosters a more successful change implementation. She actually describes resistance as "ambivalence" and not so much as resistance, as the common term implies. Her study proposed that actual resistance to change was relatively rare and that most of the 'resistance' to change that

organizational scholars were seeing was more of an ambivalence and not nearly as contentious as real resistance.

As mentioned, resistance to change and innovation is an area that this research will explore in the following pages. Having defined this case of organizational change as an innovation, I intend to examine resistance based on Piderit's work. Is this a case for ambivalence? This research will also explore whether the context of innovation carries different implications or outcomes. Van de Ven et al. (2008) discuss the idea of "setbacks" to the innovation implementation process, however, the innovation literature discusses resistance to innovation solely in terms of consumer resistance to a product innovation. Resistance to innovation on an internal level, such as the context of this research, is rarely considered in the literature.

In summary, the literatures on organizational innovation, change, power, identity, and resistance articulate and define this research agenda. What this chapter has demonstrated is that current literature views organizations as organic entities that have human-like abilities to grow, adapt, and improve, and argues that the exertion of power and control, as well as culture and resistance, are expressed in the internal innovation and change processes.

Chapter Four: Methodological Approach and Data Collection Methods

As a researcher working on a grant that spoke to the larger implications of FREE in terms of work and family domains, as well as the implications of increased schedule control and health, I was given an opportunity to also examine my own interests. Not having been immersed in the resistance to change literature at the time, I focused initially on understanding how resistance unfolded in a large organization. Armed with little research experience as a new graduate student, my goal was to observe and understand resistance in the context of innovation and identify underlying trends and responses that would provide further insight and build theory. This chapter will address my overall methodological approach to the research process and my data collection methods. I make a clear distinction between these two categories as I see each of them as having a different role in the initial approach to, and the collecting and handling of, the data. My methodological stance, as described below, included a grounded theory perspective based on Corbin and Strauss (1990, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln 1994). My actual data *collection* methods and the investigation of the resistance-change phenomena through the collection, classification and analysis of data, were based on case study methods, primarily as described by Yin (1994), Denzin and Lincoln (1994), and White et al. (2009).

The following chapter will describe the FREE initiative and implementation in great detail, setting the stage for the analytic chapters that dissect its components and document the resistance-response-change loop. In the literature review preceding this discussion of methods and analysis, I began to describe FREE as both an innovation and

as a dialectic process. Both of these were emergent themes that became evident from session observations and discussions with the change agents. In the following pages, I construct and discuss my research aims and analytic approach that observes the phenomenon of the dialectic in action, opposition to change, and explores the impact that it has on change agents and subsequent adaptations to the innovation implementation process.

The Situation and Context

Data collected for this dissertation were part of a larger study conducted by the Flexible Work and Well-Being Center in the Population Center at the University of Minnesota. With funding from the NIH, the CDC, and the Sloan Foundation (IRB approval #0510S76991), the PI's set out to examine flexible work options and their impact the organizational, health, and work-family interfaces. Directed by these PI's, along with fellow grad student, Graduate Student 1, we observed over 154 FREE training sessions. As a graduate student researcher that had been brought onto the project to collect and analyze data, I was informed that this data would also be available to me in my dissertation analysis. My larger interests in documenting and understanding this organizational change and innovation spanned beyond the flexible work and work-family research implications. I was more specifically interested in organizational change and innovation, as well as resistance to change and the social dynamics and processes involved in resisting.

I began this dissertation research using grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1997), but also by using a case study design (Yin 1994), where potentially my case could

be the organization, the change process, or cases of resistance. This is how I distinguish between approach and collection methods. I view the approach to the research, the formation of the research question, and the construction of theory as separate from the methods used to collect data. I make further distinctions between these two processes below.

Methodological Approach: Grounded Theory

My methodological approach was based on grounded theory's no a priori expectations with regard to the research setting, using very little literature to guide the topic in general, the research questions themselves, or the variables or outcomes under study. I entered the field and the data collection process with only the desire to understand *how* organizational change and modes of resistance unfolded, operated, and evolved within the context of the FREE implementation. What I began with were some orienting questions about resistance to change and its potential impacts. My orienting questions were:

1. What qualifies as resistance in this case, and in what context?
2. How does resistance to change unfold (meaning in what was it represented, reacted to, and addressed) during the FREE implementation process, if in effect, it does emerge at all?
3. What impact does resistance have on the change, the organization, individuals?

Since grounded theory specifically evades setting theoretical propositions at the outset, (even though case studies typically involve the use of these predictive techniques in addition to developing hypotheses to test) I refrained from setting propositions early on

in the data collection phase because absorbing what I was witnessing and observing social and structural dynamics took priority over anticipating results or defining potential plausible outcomes. As I began data collection, I refined my research questions to suit emergent themes and trends, letting observations drive my questions rather than theory or preconceived expectations.

One of the ideas behind this grounded theory was to be aware that resistance to change is a phenomenon that exists in the organizational world, but to practice more of an emergent understanding of the concept rather than a pre-determined, defined. One of my goals was to understand, within this context, what constitutes resistance. In this sense, is the operation of such a social phenomena bounded by verbal expressions? Does body language substantiate resistance? These were motivating questions that I intended to answer as my research proceeded. During the 2.5 year data collection window, I drafted and narrowed my thoughts on resistance, arriving at definition of the concept and an argument to explain the *what* and the *how* with regard to the behaviors and interactions I had observed.

I then went on to consider the effects on the organization and the change implementation during this period and answer my remaining questions about how the process of resistance unfolds, how resistance is understood and responded to, and what the larger implications and consequences there were to the overall change implementation. The point of this data collection and this methodological approach to my research was to capture how resistance unfolded in this context and at the same time, to not necessarily be influenced or driven by previous research, understandings of, or conceptualizations of resistance to change (well, as much as one can do this). This

process emphasized a more fluid partnership between my research questions, the data, and the ultimate conclusions from the study. This process was not about clearly dissecting and defining exact phenomena and behaviors and then reporting on how these findings meshed with expectations. This process was about attempting to understand how the process unfolded. As the next section explains, once I was in the midst of collecting data and began to grasp the events and behaviors that I was witness to first hand, I began refining my questions and zeroing in on more detailed and nuanced aspects of resistance.

This dissertation is also a response to a call for further longitudinal studies of organizational change (cites). Taking a process approach to studying change (see Van de Ven 2007), this work describes the process of change over time, documenting variance and adaptations in an implementation of an innovation. This type of orientation to the data, as opposed to a variance approach that compares the before and after, allows for a more nuanced explanation of changes and events. It is through this method that researchers can demonstrate and theorize as to *how* something has changed over time. That is the intent of using this method here. This dissertation will describe how resistance emerged and how FREE adapted over time.

Data Collection Methods: Case Study Design

My data *collection* methods, however, followed that of a case study design, based primarily on Yin (1994). Although some scholars would argue that grounded theory and case study research follow opposing research agendas, aims, and outcomes, I argue that each serves a different purpose in qualitative research. I view grounded theory as an

orientation to the research setting; the stance of the researcher when developing research questions, entering the field, and refining the direction of the research based on emergent trends and themes. I consider the actual data collection and analysis as something distinct, based primarily on the scope, defined level of analysis, and desired degree of generalizability or research implications.

Thus, to evaluate the roll-out of FREE and to collect, analyze and discuss the implications of this change and resistance, I primarily followed Robert K. Yin's *Case Study Research* practice of conducting organizational research. Employing qualitative, ethnographic observations, I entered the field with a set of orienting questions (discussed above) about *how* change and resistance happen. The end goal of this dissertation research, beyond informing theory and advancing understanding of motivations and reactions to resistance in organizations, was to provide a case model that chronicled examples of, trends in, and implications for resistance to change. In a sense, generalizability was not a key component or goal of this research agenda, but contributing to understanding organizational change was what was fundamental.

Data were collected through non-participant observations of FREE training sessions. *PI 1*, *PI 2*, *Research Assistant 1*, and myself, sat in on different elements in the FREE training process and collected detailed fieldnotes of the training and the interaction occurring between individuals in the room. As mentioned previously, in total, the four of us observed over 150 sessions, each lasting anywhere from an hour to two hours in total. We were often seated in the back of the room and wrote down almost everything that was said during this time period. We noted the participants in the room, their job level and title (if possible), physical descriptions, questions, responses, side comments, jokes,

physical gestured, concerns, literally everything that was said, acted out, or written on the white board. *Research Assistant 1* and I became so efficient that after a few sessions we had nearly verbatim accounts of the verbal and non-verbal exchanges that occurred during the training. We remained detached from the group, acting solely as observers and did not interfere with the presentation of the sessions. Although we introduced ourselves and were forthright about observing these sessions to get to know the culture, employees largely disregarded our presence in the room. After each training session and set of notes, we completed our written documents with an analysis overview, summarizing the main points and key players from the session. In this end section of each document, we also began to make notes on “decompression” sessions with the *Change Agents*, where they would make comments about the overall success of the session during the clean up at the end. In this sense, *Research Assistant 1* and I became slightly more than non-participant observers. Once participants had exited the room, we began to linger for a few minutes, picking up on the *Change Agents*’ attitudes toward the group and their own summary of how things went. This helped us to ‘take a pulse’ with regard to a lot of the teams we were observing, getting another perspective on how FREE was rolling out. We then typed our hand-written notes so that a virtual document could be made and saved.

Once our hand-written notes were typed and in a text-file format, they were imported into Atlas Ti, where we coded each of these documents using over 100 a priori and emergent codes. In addition to our documentation of the training sessions, *Research Assistant 1* and myself frequently had impromptu, unplanned meetings or conversations with the *Change Agents*. Whether this occurred after training sessions, bumping into one

of them in the building, or occasionally meeting by accident at the grocery store, we kept copious notes of all of our interactions and conversations that occurred outside of the sessions as well. *PI 1* and *PI 2* also conducted several formal interviews with the *Change Agents*. Notes from spontaneous meetings, as well as these formal interviews, were also added to Atlas Ti and coded.

The codes were primarily anchored in the larger aims of the research grant, tagging everything related to work, life, health, and FREE. For this dissertation, I initially only specified codes on resistance, highlighting instances where managers or employees openly opposed the FREE implementation in these sessions, as well as discussions with the *Change Agents* where they named specific resistors and described examples. This was my first pass at coding documents for this dissertation analysis. Each document had been coded by *Research Assistant 1* and myself at least once (most documents received a second pass) while coding for the larger study aims. We achieved a 97% inter-coder reliability between the two of us. In addition, we each coded documents another time with regard to our own dissertation codes.

Taking notes and developing some ideas about resistance as the process unfolded also served as a strategic method for this analysis. Observing sessions in order, over time, also allowed me to really *see* change as it was occurring. Based on my observations during the latter parts of data collection, as well as experiences re-reading and coding notes, I began to note that FREE also changed. It became evident that the FREE process was being streamlined and adapting to the comments and reactions of participants as time went on. Often the research on organizational change examines the *change process*, or

motivations and social forces related to the change, so I began to consider adaptations to the change process in the context of my larger questions.

It also became even clearer just how unique FREE was when compared with its peer flexibility initiatives. During this time, I also began to describe FREE as an innovation, an organizational change, yes, but also something completely new and never before seen. When data collection was almost completed, I revisited by my research questions, outlining more coherent topics and outcomes than my initial, orienting questions had originally carved out. I revised these questions with greater specificity, identifying what I believed would be key components of understanding this particular instance of resistance to change.

Refined Research Questions

My revised questions probed more at the mechanisms underlying resistance, but also began to also explore its consequences, wondering if there was a link between expressions or events of resistance and the evolution of the change implementation process. My refined research questions where:

1. How does resistance to change impact the future actions of change agents and the implementation process? What happens to the implementation in the face of resistance? How is resistance responded to at an individual and at a process level?
2. What underlying motivations and social mechanisms drive resistance (such as power, culture, and structure)?

3. Is resistance to innovation something unique? How can scholars improve understanding of the innovation process through the examination of internal resistance to innovation?

These questions are concentrated in four essential areas: 1) understanding the *why* and what *type* of resistance occurs here, 2) understanding the *impacts* of resistance (i.e. what happens to the change implementation process in the face of resistance, 3) understanding relationships between resistance to change and resistance to innovation, and 4) the implications of these above three areas in the broader research and future contributions to the literature.

This case study will demonstrate why and how the FREE implementation adopted new attributes and characteristics and reveal how these changes to the implementation process were linked to acts of internal organizational resistance. Also, key within this adoption of new features and adaptations over time is the role of resistance to innovation. This case study will also show why these changes were directly related to the social atmosphere of the training sessions, construction and assertion of social and structural identities, and the organization as a whole, *not* simply random, stochastic, unrelated adaptations.

Codes and Key Concepts

While data collection was still underway, *Research Assistant 1* and I began coding the qualitative data. We began with the predetermined codes as directed by the larger study, but also left room for emergent themes and concepts. As we spent more time coding, we also agreed on these new and emergent codes that summarized trends

that were evident in the data; topics that repeatedly emerged in the training sessions and other documents we were coding at that time. Some of the topics applied directly to my dissertation. Previously in this chapter, I explained that *Research Assistant 1* and myself made a first pass through coding documents. As we moved forward with the coding and continued the data collection process, we continuously refined the coding scheme and had to make a re-pass over previously coded documents. This was a bit redundant, but also ensured that documents were reliably coded. *Research Assistant 1* and I coded our own fieldnotes, which indicated that, for my own dissertation codes, I would eventually make a pass over her set of coded documents as well. As mentioned, we achieved a 97% inter-coder-reliability rate on a sub-sample of initial documents coded.

In addition to this second pass through that I had made for trends, themes and events related specifically to my dissertation, ensuring that both my documents and *Research Assistant 1*' had been coded for my dissertation codes, I was also able to add and refine my own codes once I had refined my research questions. As I mentioned, when data collection had almost finished, I reassessed and redefined my questions, specifying not only change, but also changes to the FREE implementation, and resistance. During coding, I was also able to further define my dissertation codes, coding for these new and developing events, as well as rethinking how I defined resistance. In all, I had made three coding passes through each of the 144 total FREE training sessions, meeting notes, and interview transcriptions.

Resistance

Once I had begun to formulate my own definition of what I understood as resistance, I also probed further into the literature for guidance. I had developed a list of characteristics, behaviors, and other qualifiers that I believed constituted resistance in this case, but I also wanted to check that against some of the more widely-accepted definitions. As I began to classify resistance that emerged in these sessions, I compared what I was seeing to more prominent scholars' definitions. Sandy Piderit, a scholar whose work I was mildly familiar with at the outset of this study, has done quite a bit of work on the definition of resistance. In her 2000 Academy of Management piece, she distinguishes resistance from positive affirmation, as well as from ambivalence. Her definition of resistance in this piece is regarded as, "the set of responses to change that are negative along all three dimensions [emotional, cognitive, and intentional]" (783). Other, well-known scholars have described resistance as maintaining the status quo (Lewin 1952), and as "a reactive process where agents embedded in power relations actively oppose initiatives by other agents" (Jerminer et al. 1994:4).

During this comparative process, I noticed two things right away. First, that I loosely defined to define resistance in a similar fashion, and second, that all of these definitions were neither detailed nor exhaustive. I recognized resistance in much of the same way as Jerminer et al. 1994. Resistance is one group or people opposing another. In the social and organizational sense, what these authors described is exactly correct in that it brings in status and power relations. After this comparative process, I defined resistance as: 'a reactive process where agents embedded in power relations actively oppose initiatives through conflict with other agents' of unequal status represented in

observable signs of dissention (verbal and non-verbal) that are disruptive and counter-productive.

I make several additions to Jerminer et al.'s definition for further clarity along several dimensions. First, I emphasize conflict here. Second, unequal status is highlighted as well. As this dissertation will come to demonstrate, much of the observed resistance came in the form of status and power representations (linked to individual identity and identity conceptualizations on a grander scale). I argue that resistance does not occur between individuals or groups of equal status. In this sense, there is no power to be exerted or authority to attempt to undermine. Third, I added that resistance observable in verbal and non-verbal representations. This is fairly self-explanatory. If there is resistance, it will become evident because the goal of the resistor is to make it known that he, she, or they are standing in opposition to the change. In terms of verbal and non-verbal, I think it is important to emphasize that resistance can take many forms. In the context of this study, as the following chapter will document, resistance was evident in statements made by FREE training participants, but also in actions that required no words at all (such as getting up in the middle of the training and leaving). Fourth, it is important to stress that resistance in the context of this study is both disruptive and counter-productive. Along these lines, I think it is necessary to describe resistance as disruptive because the point is to disrupt the change or the implementation of the change. Resistance is also counter-productive. I would argue that resistance is intended to detract from the current issue or stall the change, not to produce productive dialogue. There is a difference between asking questions that promote clarity, foster

group discussion, or achieve a better understanding and statements or questions that are not meant to be helpful.

Codes

The first two described listed below were developed specifically for my dissertation. The other codes listed here were existing codes that I later used to help recall data and events. Often events of resistance did not occur solely within interactions. As my literature review established, I situate resistance in the context of organizational identity and identity construction. When I recalled codes to summarize resistance, I frequently included an additional code to provide context and explanation. This was the rationale for including codes about managers and gender examples, aiming to describe resistance that was perhaps motivated by identity through gender relationships or exertions of power and status. I also included codes about the *Change Agents* specifically, as well as particularly emotional times that occurred in the sessions.

FREE change: Changes in FREE implementation process. Descriptions, notes, examples of something in the training that was new or different about FREE. This meant any change in how FREE was previously presented. Initially, this was a comparison with the original version of the training which we observed. This then expanded to contain anything about the training that was new and never witnessed before by a researcher.

Resistance: Resistance to change/innovation was categorized as any explicit verbal dissention against the change process during a change implementation training meeting or expressed in an interview (see Jeminer et al. 1994 definition above). This is either a

direct expression of dissent, a non-verbal cue of opposition, or a joke (see Vallas 2006) (see also my definition of resistance above).

FREE implement: Discussions, in sessions, about *how* FREE gets implemented.

Gender coded: Gender concerns, debates, dynamics in the sessions/teams (such as women laughing together, sitting together, off hand comments that reveal gender differences, notes about patterns of interactions such as waiting for men to speak first, for women to enter first).

Gender explicit: Explicit discussions that happen concerning gender (such as, this is a "woman's issues" "boys will be boys" all men/women are that way, all mothers/fathers are that way).

High emotion: Spontaneous feelings in sessions- evidence that emotions are running high.

Status: *Change Agents* making reference to their feelings of being marginalized etc., or also referring to their careers in the organization.

Leadership support: Concerns about managers'/leaders' true feelings about FREE (manager as defined by the actual title of the individual: manger, director, VP, or SVP).

The unit of analysis in this case study is the actual innovation process over time. The units of observation, however, are managers and change agents, as well as the interactions between the two and events of resistance and change that occurred in the session. After collecting and coding the data, the next step was to begin to analyze the roll-out over time. Since *Research Assistant 1* and I coded during the data collection phase, documents were not necessarily processed and coded in historical order. My first

task after coding and recoding, was to order the 144 sessions and interviews from 2004-2006 (including the interviews and notes that pertained to this material) and chart the resistance and change events. I created an excel file, included in Appendix A, that includes events in all 144 sessions and interviews, tracked these events over time. Next to each session, is a check mark as to whether resistance or change occurred in that particular session. This case, as mentioned, consisted of numerous events of both resistance and change. Thus, it is difficult to estimate and summarize this research in the language of 'sample size,' beyond a simple frequency of occurrence with regard to events.

Once this time-series was established, next I examined the specific events of resistance and change, connecting events of resistance to the immediate response of the change agents, but also to the events of change in the following sessions. I began to see patterns emerge in a resistance-response loop. The argument that I establish and support in the following analytic chapters further explains this resistance-response loop and also delves into the apparent motivations for resistance. Essentially, I argue that 1) individual identity and the social construction of identity serve as potential motivators for resistance to change at macro, meso, and micro levels of abstraction, 2) that the dialectic nature of the FREE implementation fostered and promoted resistance to the change, 3) that resistance to change impacts the overall implementation of the change moving forward, and finally, 4) that this is a case of resisting innovation and that this carries with it a different set of resistance factors and motivations. In light of these above conclusions, I argue that scholarly work on the implementation of change and innovation, especially process models, incorporate a more detailed and in-depth understanding of the

motivations for and responses to resistance. Based on this emerging research and connection to existing theory, I also propose an explanation for underlying mechanisms around resistance to change, and specifically resistance to innovation.

Chapter 5: Operation of Dialectic Processes

Although the overall implementation was deemed a success, and there were certainly positive and beneficial outcomes associated with FREE (see Chapter 2), resistance to FREE, especially on the part of managers, emerged in the training sessions. As the FREE process unfolded, observing resistance in action became second nature to myself and the other researchers involved in the data collection. Reviewing the data for this analysis, it was evident that *resistance* to FREE was both prevalent and explicit. As the analysis of events of resistance unfolded, three trends in resistance to the FREE change initiative emerged. Resistance often came in the form of defending the current organization of work, national corporate culture, and fighting back against the ideas behind the concept. Additionally, resistance was present in the form of refusal to accept the changes that FREE required managers and employees to make to their daily work lives or to their own roles in the workplace. Participants also resisted the change agents, themselves, on an interpersonal level, questioning their authority and legitimacy. These instances or events of resistance were scattered through our notes of the training sessions during the two and a half years of the study (see Table 1 for full outline of events).

The Change Agents' Use of the Dialectic Model

The dialectical model, at its very inception, incorporated conflict, although not necessarily in the form of didactic comparison that the *Change Agents* had intended. By setting FREE in contrast to the current work norms, they created a thesis-antithesis presentation of their workplace change that also immediately created conflict with

participants who appreciated the current state of work. Recall that, at the very macro level, FREE asked participants to suspend their individual beliefs about work and to begin to re-examine how work is organized at an institutional level.

Along with this, the *Change Agents* asked that participants actually challenge and change the macro level institution of work in the corporate United States, as well as their conceptualization of the ideal worker. Operationally, FREE also challenged the culture of the organization at the meso level, requiring participants to interact with their teams and customers in an entirely different manner. Third, FREE forced individuals to make changes in their daily work habits and routines that challenged the power and status of managers, at the micro level. Figure 1 demonstrates how FREE challenged managers at all three levels of abstraction.

Three Levels of Resistance

Recall from the previous chapter that I defined resistance based primarily on Jerminer et al. (1994). For purposes of this study, resistance is defined as:

a reactive process where agents embedded in power relations actively oppose initiatives through conflict with other agents of unequal status. These interactions are represented in observable signs of dissention of one party against another, including verbal and non-verbal behaviors that are disruptive and counter-productive.

Again, this definition of resistance stresses that resistance is not a healthy discussion among participants. Comments and conversations that were based on creating an understanding were not labeled instances of resistance in this model. Resistance is not

an interaction that is based on productive dialogue. In this case, I am examining resistance to change, specifically. Thus, resistance in this context comes in the form of individuals that resist (based on the above definition) the implementation of a change. Resistance is intended to disrupt and is laden with power and status dynamics (see Weber's definition of power and discussion of resistance and domination, Weber 1968).

As mentioned above, three levels of resistance emerged. From the review and classification of these events of resistance during the training, I deduced that resistance was forming at the very three levels of abstraction that FREE seemed to challenge originally. Examples of resistance that emerged were patterned around three basic trends or categories. Recall from the FREE description and Figure 1, that the change agents had intentionally constructed a macro-dialectic, pitting FREE against the current institution of work and the ideal worker norm. What they had also created, perhaps unintentionally and even unfortunately, was a repeating set of dialectic models, putting participants in conflict with their beliefs and identities, as well as promoting disagreement with the implementation. The resistance and conflict that was exhibited in these sessions pinpointed how FREE challenged existing beliefs about how *work* should be conceptualized, changing the culture of the *organization*, as well as changing *individual* habits and routines that impact status. In this sense, resistance was motivated by and focused on reactions to change processes and challenges at these three levels of abstraction. Figure 2 depicts how the challenges at each level sparked resistance to abstract ideas, changes the actual changes in work process, and resistance to individuals based on status. As this chapter will unravel, all three levels point down to the construction of the self and individual identity.

It is difficult to classify the number of events of resistance simply because sometimes resistance emerged once in a session by one participant, and other sessions were riddled with resistant comments and behaviors from multiple organizational actors. Out of the 140 training sessions that we observed, as well as the additional 7 interviews and conversations that we also recorded during that time, I classified 48 sessions and/or interviews or conversations that contained documented resistance. That is, at least one event occurred during the session. For purposes of this analysis, frequencies of overall sessions where the various forms of resistance emerged are provided, indicating that a particular session contained at least one event of resistance.

Through examination of events of resistance and classification of levels of abstraction, there were obvious catalysts of resistance that propelled each of these pathways. This chapter describes the organization and classification of resistance into these three emergent categories. I describe below the trends in what, substantively, managers were resisting in this session. Resistance was initiated by one of above three motivating factors, all influenced by the proposed shift in work and culture, and all prompted by the dialectic nature of the FREE implementation model. This chapter describes the escalating instances of resistance that the *Change Agents* encountered and develops a theoretical argument to identify and explain the potential mechanisms that triggered this emergent resistance to change (and innovation). In addition, this chapter begins to describe the *effects* of resistance, exploring the relationship between expressions of resistance and the change agents' responses to those actions.

Situating the Change: The Macro Dialectic and Critique of the Larger Social

Structure

Macro level resistance was classified as resisting the ideas behind FREE at an institutional level. Here, managers usually pushed back on the change agents with regard to changing the concept of what work means on a large-scale. These events typically took place in the beginning sessions that introduced the FREE concept such as the Manager Initiation Session (with managers only) and the Initiation Session. Beginning in these sessions and permeating subsequent training, these challenges to the way work is organized were at the forefront of the discussion. In total, there were 7 sessions that contained macro level resistance.

The Initiation (the first full-group training session) began with a powerpoint presentation that depicted workers chained to their desks, Dilbert cartoons about redundant work and difficult bosses, the *Change Agents* even played Dolly Parton's "9-5" theme song. They began the discussion by asking a series of rhetorical *why* questions, asking participants to begin to question why work is organized in these ways. The *Change Agents* described the history of work, depicting the movement from farm labor to industrialization to cubicles. Framing their argument in the twenty-first century, technological era, they began to challenge standards about working long hours in the office and not being allowed to telecommute, stating that these processes and practices are long out of date.

Enter the macro dialectical model. The *Change Agents* had set the stage for their argument for a new standard of working by framing the status quo as obsolete and outmoded. In this respect, they presented the "problem" to their audience so that they could

then present their solution, FREE. The *Change Agents* overtly challenged routines about work that currently existed, juxtaposing these current practices with their vision of the “future of work.”

FREE confronted the institution of work, as well as hours and location, through the above examples by rhetorically asking why work must be organized in this way. They proposed that, as long as employees completed their work on time (the FREE mantra), meeting whatever goals and expectations were put upon them, that they should no longer be subject to or limited by these prevailing institutions. The *Change Agents*' argument was further strengthened by advancement of technology and the ability to create and sustain a mobile workforce. They argued that it was time to remove these expectations around work hours and schedules, allowing employees to work from wherever, whenever, by creating a 24-7 work week and not limiting work to 8-5, Monday through Friday.

Resistance to FREE at this macro level was rooted in the framing of FREE as competing with traditional work norms and the challenges to the social construction of work in the US. Acts of resistance at this level were anchored in the question: *are we, as individuals or as an organization, prepared to challenge the rules and norms of corporate America?* Events of resistance that were classified at this macro level of resistance often expressed a simple unwillingness to think about work differently and exemplified an unwillingness to change the social construction of work at the broader level.

For example, during a Leadership Meeting (document P42) (the first contact with migrating teams and containing only managers), one male manager commented; “FREE is disconnected from reality.” The researcher documented his full comment:

They will think that they can’t do this [make this big of a change] “by ourselves” and they’ll be skeptical of the corporate culture changing much at all. He said there is a risk that people will think “Well, walk a day in my shoes” and then tell me how this can happen.

In another introductory leadership session (P50) a different male manager remarked; “globally, this won’t work,” and “the company won’t survive this.” In a later Leadership session, a male manager commented that, “FREE doesn’t even feel like it can be real” (P96). A male manager in yet another Leadership session stated that he “fundamentally disagrees” with the FREE concept (P98). These are all examples of macro level resistance in that these managers are resisting the very idea of FREE. These are also classified as resistance because these are all instances where the enacted behavior appeared to intend to disrupt FREE and its implementation. These comments (that often created long discussions about FREE that detracted from the training session) did not spark productive conversations and create a better understanding of the concept.

One particular training session was chock-full of managers that resisted almost every aspect of what FREE stood for and attempted to change. One female manager stated that she “cannot handle this,” another said that “people need to be in the office because face-time is necessary,” and a male manager argued that “this [changes with FREE] looks nice, but doesn’t seem feasible” (P113).

Other typical comments focused on how there is nothing wrong with the current corporate culture (as defined by the ideal worker norm), and thus no real reason to make

the move to something like FREE. These comments were classified as macro level resistance because these individuals pushed back on FREE's bigger-picture goals and challenges. They were also classified as resistance because they were not party to a productive discussion where a better understanding of FREE or a better implementation of FREE was the goal.

In terms of the culture within the organization more specifically, which clearly mirrors white collar corporate America, some managers seemed to take offense at the criticism and voice resistance in terms of clear examples as to why the company culture is not broken and therefore does not need fixing. As the *Change Agents* clearly probed for negative responses to the current culture in the example described previously in this chapter, some participants refused to be critical. Managers argued that all of the current practices are beneficial to *Streamline* and pointed an angry finger at the *Change Agents* for suggesting otherwise. Two male managers on different occasions described the discussion of the current culture as "too negative" (P67 and P53), another male manager argued that no meetings are unproductive (P75). Yet another male manager remarked, "the generalizations about the current culture are troubling" (P69). The researcher describes:

[Female manager] said at this point that these "generalizations" about the company culture were "troubling" her. *Change Agent 1* said that she was right, and that these generalizations were about corporate culture in general as well as *Streamline* and that they are actually working to do something about them here at *Streamline*. She said "we are turning the tide."

Change Agent 1 went on to discuss how she and *Change Agent 2* intended to create radical change through providing stark, contrasting examples of how work needs

to change. It was interesting though, the *Change Agents* only provided this ‘turning the tide’ explanation when confronted about their discussion of the current culture. It was as if this explanation was a justification for critiquing the current organizational culture, provided only if they were tested (see Chapter 6 for more discussion of this).

In a Leadership Panel (a non-standard session that was sometimes held before groups began the FREE migration) a female manager stated that she did not want her employees to “work differently than they already do.” She was highlighting her attitude toward the changes that FREE intended to make to the culture and to her own current work practices. At the time she made this comment, another female manager in the session remarked directly to her that they will “survive this one too,” as if FREE is a hurdle that they need to overcome (P103).

In a Restructure session (P77), two managers (both male and female) critiqued the guideposts of FREE (bigger-picture elements of what FREE is and what it is not), picking each one apart and describing why it will not work in their team. The male manager in this session stated, “we cannot dive into this.” A female manager in another session simply commented that she did “not like the guideposts” (P104). In this case, and in most others (as described further at the end of this chapter), the *Change Agents*’ typical response to this behavior was to ignore the comment, change the subject, or inform the group that the concern in question will be addressed later, in another session.

These comments were clearly pushing back on the FREE journey that the *Change Agents* had envisioned. The FREE implementation was clearly designed to break down aspects of corporate America and of work within the organization that were institutionalized—routine and unquestioned. These managers simply would not

cooperate with the discussion and vision toward which the *Change Agents* were attempting to lead these groups.

All of these examples tie in to the broader conceptualization of FREE as a construct, which challenges the existing structure of work. These comments and expressions of resistance at this macro level all express a concern as to whether changing the structure of work is possible and plausible. It is interesting to step back and take a glimpse at potential reasons why resistance may emerge, beyond the most basic understanding or misunderstanding of the concept. Thinking about resistance to change in this light brings about new dynamics and considerations. It seems as though the *Change Agents'* dialectic change model may have backfired in this case. It did not seem to matter whether the setting was a manager-only session or one that included employees, managers seemed comfortable exhibiting their resistance in either context.

Structuring the Training: The Meso (Operational) Dialectic

Resistance at the meso (or operational) level was classified by events that dealt with the organization and the more practical changes that would occur within everyday work and interactions. At this *operational* level (meaning the actual, work-related changes with FREE), resistance emerged more as concerns about changing the hard aspects of everyday work rather than the bigger-picture ideas about what constitutes work. Thus, examples of events of resistance that fit here have more to do with the practical application of FREE onto an existing work culture. Resistance at this level appeared to be motivated by the notion of, *are we, as individuals and as the organization, ready to change the culture and ways of operating and conducting daily work?* This type

of resistance typically emerged in the Language Sessions and Restructure Sessions, where the *Change Agents* focused specifically on changing daily work routines. In total, 19 sessions and interviews with the *Change Agents* contained resistance at the meso level occurred.

The Language Session routinely began with a conversation about what FREE is and first asked participants to list characteristics of FREE. This list was written on a white board or a large post-it notes and typically consisted of phrases such as flexibility, autonomy, freedom, working how we work best, and smart. Participants were then asked to list characteristics of their current culture, often probing for the unproductive or inefficient work practices that the change agents knew were common to the culture. Characteristics typically listed were meetings, drive-bys (coworkers dropping by unannounced), face-time (face-to-face communication, especially with superiors), fire drills (last minute unplanned tasks often viewed as crises). If groups did not mention these specific qualities, the *Change Agents* typically brought them up to the group. The next task in the Language Session was then to make a list of feelings associated with each of these lists: feelings that emerge when participants thought of the FREE culture versus feelings that emerged when participants thought about the current culture. Feelings associated with the currently culture were typically described by participants as anxious, stressed, time-starved, wasted time, and unproductive. Although the *Change Agents* did not call out these terms in the sessions, it was clear that these were the types of adjectives they were seeking. The set up for the discussion and the current culture of the organization lead participants to describe the current culture in this manner. Frequent feelings associated with the FREE culture were free, flexible, empowered, autonomous,

stress-free, and productive. In this same vein, the *Change Agents* prompted participants to FREE in a positive light, very much counter to the way they viewed the current culture. Although participants occasionally responded with comments describing FREE in a negative or anxious light, the *Change Agents* made an effort to redirect these comments into positive adjectives. The goal was then to compare the two sets of feelings and then ask participants which way they would rather feel.

The other activity found in the Language Session dealt with defining what Language is and walked participants through a roleplay. Here volunteers were given a rubber glove to wear and were asked to stick their hand into a bag of “Language” (a Ziplock bag labeled “Language”), pull out a card, and read the statement on the card aloud to another employee in the room. The goal here was to walk participants through examples of Language and help them learn to diffuse the situation. The *Change Agents* often referred to this as “eradicating Language.”

The Restructure Session typically focused on the day-to-day work of the team that was migrating. The main activity of during this session was the “Calendar game.” Participants were asked to get up and put dots on a large, generic monthly calendar that the *Change Agents* posted on the wall. Participants were asked to think of work over a 7-day period. The *Change Agents* would then ask the group to place a green dot on days they would like to work in the office, a yellow dot on days they would like to work from off-site, and a red dot on days they would prefer not to work at all. Each participant was required to place one dot on each day of the month. The rest of the session was spent discussing the calendar, times, schedules, and how to work better together as a group. At the very end of the session, the *Change Agents* would ask each participant to make one

commitment to do something different in their work. In closing, they showed a video from Franklin Covey, Inc. (a company that makes office and HR training supplies) about making the most of one's time and life.

In document P6, a Leadership Panel (sometimes conducted as a meeting prior to the Manager Initiation, where leaders have the opportunity to engage in a Q&A with previous FREE participants), one manager verbalized that he did not support this change and then walked out of the meeting. This male manager, white and in his 50's, described being on vacation and then having to respond to messages on his Blackberry smartphone. The *Change Agents* agreed, stating that was an option for employees if they chose to work while on vacation with FREE. *Change Agent 2* also acknowledged that this is not a requirement, that employees will still have the option to take vacation or other time off and leave work alone. The researcher described this managers' comments:

Mark's resistance was palpable, I thought. He gave very clear signals to his team and to the larger group that he was currently uncommitted and even skeptical, with his introduction. I interpreted his comment about using his Blackberry during his recent vacation as a way to reveal his commitment to the firm and the importance of his input, even when he is away from the office. I thought his "OK" before leaving was a verbal blow-off of *Change Agent 2's* claim that it was important to take real vacations. *Change Agent 2*, though, did not interpret his comments that way but instead seemed to think his statement that he was "struggling" with this meant he wanted to be able to leave work at the office when he was on vacation.

This is an example where one participant "struggled" with leaving the old practices behind and adopting a new perspective on how vacations should work. This event of resistance describes the unwillingness to let go of the current culture, and provides explicit and tangible examples of why this change may be problematic.

Another example that illustrates the clash between the old and new culture is a female manager who commented that she knew of another team that began FREE quickly abandoned their new work routines and went back to their old patterns. She then stated that the FREE initiative was not worth the work (P65).

Another common theme among meso or operational level resistance is an inability to trust that employees will continue to get the work done. In the 134 number of sessions that we observed in total, conversations about employees being a “slacker” occurred 49 times. On some of these occasions, the *Change Agents* initiated this discussion when trust seemed to be an issue. Other times, managers brought up the fear that employees may take advantage of the freedom provided by the initiative. One male manager stated that, “FREE becomes an entitlement” (P96). A researcher describes the session:

[Male manager] asks a question about “company financials and FREE” saying that “sales are good now” and is worried that a “FREE becomes an entitlement” that “people do more with less” and that “we have FREE when the grass is green.” (he was saying a couple jumbled things here- that FREE is being implemented during a good time- what happens when economy turns sluggish; and that he sees FREE as entitlement that people come to expect). Somewhere in here, he looks at me and says that he’s not sure how much he can say with me in the room, *Change Agent 2* immediately says that we have a confidentiality agreement in place and I nod, tell him it’s fine and put my pen down.

Along with a creating a space for a lack of trust (that apparently does not exist to these managers when their employees are required to work physically on campus), managers commented that FREE would actually create more stress for the leadership. One high-level HR male executive commented that “FREE creates guilt and cognitive dissonance” (P88). At this meso level, events of resistance also focused on potential consequences of a failed initiative. Many of these managers’ ultimate concern was what

would happen to the business if everyday practices were changed. Again, this highlights resistance to norms and behaviors associated with daily work.

In perhaps one of the most poignant examples, one high-level executive even made fun of the FREE initiative in a public, all-company meeting. (P295). Although we did not directly observe this meeting, the *Change Agents* the setting to *PI 1* and *PI 2* during one of several in-depth interviews that was recoded and later transcribed:

Change Agent 1: [top-level executive] has this um fun thing that he's kind of doing at meetings now where he's doing the top 10 just like on Letterman...

PI 1: Yeah.

Change Agent 1: and the last round of this weekly get together, figure out the problem and solve it, um there were some things that happened in the afternoon session where um based on what needed to be done, some people didn't return to the afternoon because it wasn't...

PI 1: Related.

Change Agent 1: It wasn't necessary, they didn't need to, so he did the top ten reasons in front of all of the officers and directors of why people didn't come back in the afternoon...And our um, boss was in there, [female manager above the *Change Agents*], and the number 4 reason was because they were FREEing...

PI 1: Oh my!

Change Agent 1: So of course the whole room erupted in laughter and um...Our boss was...well angry probably doesn't describe it...

Change Agent 2: Livid. She was very agitated.

Change Agent 1: ...and interestingly enough there was enough people in the room that could have said something but again it would have been political suicide... ..the point is that there's enough people now really understanding from a deeper level what this means and they can't joke about it anymore they can't... it's not funny to make that joke.

At this meso level managers were resisting the actual implementation of everyday work practices, proposing that the changes associated with FREE will ultimately hurt the company, cause guilt and misunderstandings, and decrease productivity. These examples all provide insight into an unwillingness to change work habits and routines. These concerns also zero-in on managers being required to place more trust in their employees and to let go of their control over work time and locations.

Evaluating Identities: The Micro Dialectic, Confronting Individuals and Individual legitimacy

I classified micro resistance as conflict in inter-personal interaction that did not necessarily challenge the larger ideas about FREE, but more the individuals within the training session—the change agents specifically. Forms of resistance and patterns of expression that were classified as this level of resistance were opposition to the change, yes, but in the context of the abilities and qualifications of the change agents administering the training. These events challenged the legitimacy of the *Change Agents* at a personal level, demonstrating resistance not through challenging the conceptual ideas or even changes to daily work habits, but through personal attacks.

Hence the notion of the individual level dialectic; once the larger-scale institutions had been challenged and the characteristics of the organization that are in need of change had been defined, the actual action (or motor of change) rests on individual managers and employees to alter their thinking. These shifts in thinking and the action grounded in a challenge to the existing way of working can produce conflict between individuals, conflicts within individuals, challenges to individual legitimacy, and

resistance or ambivalence to the change.

This type of resistance was demonstrated in all session types, although not typically in the Initiation Session or in the Discussion Session. This level of resistance seemed to be motivated by the thought, *are we, individuals, ready to accept the information and legitimacy of the change agents?* One possible explanation for this could be that these clear demonstrations of individual power and authority were best demonstrated by leaders while in smaller groups (as in the Language and Restructure Sessions) rather than the larger group Initiation and Discussion Sessions. In total, 27 sessions and conversations exhibited micro level resistance.

For example, several managers attacked the *Change Agents'* personality traits. In a Restructure, one male manager essentially stated that *Change Agent 2* is not living the values of the company (P57). In another Leadership session, a male manager told *Change Agent 2* that she was "too negative" (P53). A female manager in a Language Session criticized *Change Agent 2's* description of the current company and the need to create and innovate by accusing *Change Agent 2* of "saying the company isn't innovative enough" (P83). With regard to a similar discussion of the current culture in a Check-In Session, a male manager instructed *Change Agent 2* to "be careful about her language" when describing the negatives of the current culture (P98). In a Language Session, the researcher notes (P58):

It's clear that [a male manager] does not see the disconnect between how managers see the culture and how individual employees experience it. *Change Agent 2* tells them how these Language sessions usually go and how other teams, the rest of the *Streamline* culture, experience major problems and frustrations with the company's current culture. "What

about the Viewpoints?” the manager [interrupts] her. He is questioning everything she’s saying about the culture. “I don’t like being so negative!” he says.

In a particularly emotional Language Session, one male manager mouthed back to *Change Agent 1* repeatedly. His sarcasm was so blatant and disruptive that *Change Agent 1* eventually had to call him out with an “excuse me, [name]” and ask him to stop (P68). In another Language Session, a male manager told *Change Agent 2* that he was admittedly “skeptical of FREE” and then went on to say, “but you [*Change Agent 2*] probably wouldn’t know how to spell that” (P71).

During a Manager Initiation Session (P36) a male manager stated that the *Change Agents* needed to provide teams with best-practices from other groups, something that the change agents were opposed to in principle. According to their change and implementation paradigm, providing teams with best-practices from other groups would limit the imagination and problem-solving of other groups. The *Change Agents* encouraged teams to discover new patterns on their own. In this particular session, this manager essentially told the *Change Agents* that they should be required to do so.

During several Assessment sessions where the *Change Agents* walked managers through a survey of pre-FREE measures of the teams’ culture and work practices, managers expressed this individual-level resistance. The *Change Agents* were told on several different occasions that they were not qualified to measure these practices, nor interpret the results. One male manager directly stated, “managers are not satisfied with your ability to measure this” (P43). Two male managers in two different Leadership sessions critiqued the responses and inferences made from this data. One described their surveys as “bogus” (P50).

One of the departments that was markedly resistant to FREE was responsible for evaluating employees on an annual basis. During their migration, *Change Agent 1* received some atypically low scores on her evaluations. She described, in a one-on-one conversation with a researcher after a session, how “FREE is upsetting their game.” *Change Agent 1* believed that her evaluations were reflective of the department’s critique of FREE, and not of her true performance as a worker. She thought that she was being criticized and labeled negatively because that department was not on board with FREE. She quoted them as telling her that she “needed more humility” (P295).

Non-compliance, Non-participation, Distractions, and Absence

Rarely, resistance at this individual level showed itself through non-verbal behaviors that emphasized non-compliance with the FREE initiative, non-participation in session activities, distractions that appeared to intentionally detract from the training, and failure to be present for the training (which was common, but not something we were able to track). These were events where participants refused to comply or answer questions, refused to participate, or clearly exhibited behavior that was intended to be disruptive. But because these instances were largely non-verbal or were non-sequitur in nature, it is difficult to establish the motivating force behind the resistance. I classified these events as resistance at the micro level because these behaviors were disrespectful to the change agents and undermined their authority within and meeting room and within the company.

For instance, in one Manager Initiation Session, a male manager kept spinning in his chair. This was a man in his 40’s or 50’s spinning his chair around at the table.

Every once in a while, he would lean his chair far back and then sit all the way up. He did not say much throughout the session, but his actions were extremely distracting to both the group and to the change agents. Eventually he pushed his chair back from the table and threw his hands up as if he gave up (P66). In two other sessions that he attended with his subordinates, (P30 and P55), he simply got up and walked out in the middle of the meeting. The researcher present in these sessions described all of these behaviors as particularly disruptive. I classified this as resistance at the micro level because, although this manager did not directly challenge the *Change Agents*, his actions were intended to be distracting and disruptive. It was obvious that this manager was being intentionally disrespectful. He continued this behavior in his teams' Language session, where several of his employees later approached *Change Agent 2* and stated that they were not comfortable going through the FREE training with their manager in the room.

In another example, one male manager remarked that he could not participate in the Language cards activity because he was allergic to latex (P69). Clearly this was not a serious health issue in this case, as the manager delivered this statement with sarcasm. Not only that, but the gloves used in the Language activity were latex free. This was simply a reason not to participate and was again intended to be disruptive and non-compliant. This particular manager was difficult throughout the session.

Rarely, but on some occasions, sessions were canceled at the last minute because managers did not show up for the training. Without the manager in the room to get the same messages as the employees and to talk through changes with the whole group together, there was little point in continuing to go forward with the meeting. Although it

is impossible to know whether these cancellations due to manager non-participation were always intentional resistance, there was at least one instance where this was an act of obvious resistance. One Manager Initiation Session was scheduled for a group of managers that was known for being particularly anti-FREE. A total of 15 managers had replied and accepted the meeting invitation but only 6 arrived on time. The *Change Agents* waited for several minutes, but the other nine never reported. In this particular case, these other managers were apparently choosing not to appear out of disrespect and resistance to FREE. I again classified this at the micro level because it demonstrates disruption in the sessions that appears to be aimed directly at the change agents.

Resistance Explained: Challenges to Individual Identity at the Macro, Meso, and Micro levels

The use of this change implementation model notwithstanding, resistance emerged in a pattern that does suggest that a large number of FREE participants had difficulty in processing the argument to move from the old culture to the new way of conducting work and that this motivated them to respond in resistance. Essentially, the above paragraphs describe three main reasons (or levels) of resistance. Managers resisted changing their basic understandings of what work is and what it means to be a worker, changing their daily work routines, and the legitimacy of the change agents at a micro level. But, I propose here, that the argument can also be tracked back to identity and the construction of individual identity in the organization. As such, participants interpreted this challenge to the existing structure of work as challenges to one of the aspects that defined their own, individual identity. As the literature section highlighted, being a

worker and being part of a work organization is one aspect of the construction of the individual identity. As Brewer and Gardner (1996) and Brickson and Brewer (2001) explain, membership in organizations is a component of individual identity construction. Further, having a positive-self-identification with the organization fosters a satisfaction with one's own identity (Robie et al.1998).

What is perhaps most interesting about this resistance is that managers were typically the ones to express dissent during the sessions. It was not as if lower-level employees did not speak up or participant in the meetings. Their roles appeared more as either passive actors, not willing to take sides, or as cheerleaders, supporting FREE—especially in sessions where managers were not resistant. But the interesting aspect of this managerial resistance is that the ability to disagree is built-into their status within the hierarchy of the organization. Managers who believed otherwise, had the opportunity and ability to speak up in these sessions because of their structural position. In this case, challenges to identity explains the motor of resistance and the structure of the hierarchy explains the ability of the resister to express the resistance.

Managers, in a higher status position than the *Change Agents*, had the power and authority to challenge this organizational innovation in a public forum. Again, the examples and events used here describe resistance as more than a simple questioning or productive discussion. Events classified as resistance were clearly intended to be uncooperative and to impede the innovation implementation process. The *Change Agents*, as mid-level employees were structurally below the managers but equivalent to or above most of the employees in the training sessions. The implication here is not that they submitted to the managers' authority, they did so only in terms of the face-to-face

interaction within the sessions. The *Change Agents* were not in a position to legitimately challenge managers.

Macro Level Challenges to Individual Identity

At the macro or institutional level, employees and managers criticized the ideas behind FREE and its challenges to the institution of work. These participants who expressed resistance based on FREE not equating with “reality” or “not being feasible,” illustrates identity challenges at the macro level. These individuals challenged the changes that FREE proposed to make to the definition of work at a broad level. This research suggests that this form of macro level resistance is motivated by changing the definition of work, and thus challenging how these individuals are defined by their work. In a context that values demonstrated dedication to work, in-office presence, and long work hours, challenging those norms also challenges the current standard by which all white-collar workers are measured. As described, this critique of the current work environment explicitly challenges the ideal worker norm. If this is no longer the standard then 1) how are employees and managers now supposed to judge themselves and others? What is the new standard for a good worker? And 2) what does this mean for workers who pride themselves on their ability to measure up to the ideal worker norm? I propose that this macro level resistance is actually about how FREE challenges individual identity constructions through challenging larger-scale institutionalized norms. If the institution is deconstructed and there is no clear replacement, this is not simply a case of adhering to the current practices because change is hard and expensive, this is a case for resistance based in challenges to individual identities. Changing the values of the organization

changes individuals' self-identification with the organization (Ashforth and Mael 1989), potentially in a beneficial manner, but also potentially in a negative fashion. Based on previous research regarding individual identity construction and organizational affiliation (Albert, et al. 2000; Brewer and Gardner 1996; Brickson 2005; Brickson and Brewer 2001; Brewer and Gardner 1996; Glynn 2000; Golden-Biddle and Rao 1997) I propose that changes to the conceptualization of work and what it means to be a good worker create a divide among FREE participants' current organizational selves (both in and out of the organization). I further propose that this contributes to their resistance to the change implementation.

Van de Ven and Engleman (2004) describe how resistance emerges when individuals confront different or competing schemas. George and Jones (2001) also discuss contradictory schemas or world-views that produce resistance in similar cases. When presented with a new paradigm, organizational actors often cling to what they know, the past, rather than change their work practices, especially when established expectations are challenged. In this case, the *Change Agents* were asking FREE participants to suspend and to change what they currently believe about work. Again, this ties back to the establishment of identity. Resistance is a form of rationalizing the discrepancy between the current state and the proposed change (George and Jones 2001). Again rooted in potential alterations to one's own identity, these managers resisted changing their thought patterns around work and what it means to be a good worker.

The fact that the more prevalent resisters were male managers also speaks to this tie to the ideal worker norm and what it means to be a good worker. Managers, especially male managers, have long strived to live up to the ideal worker standard and

FREE is challenging and changing this standard. Although some female managers did express resistance, the main defenders of the status quo (Kellogg 2011) were male managers—a group that had the most to lose with regard to how they construct their identity as a worker.

This data does not have the capability to speak directly to or draw a causal link between challenges and threats to identity and to resistance. This explanation is theoretical, developed from the trends in resistance. From the comments and discussions around the three levels of abstraction, macro, meso, and micro, I offer a potential mechanism that would explain the motor of resistance. In this case, that is that managers resist FREE (an potentially other organizational changes) because it in effect requires them to change as well. Organizational changes, especially one that challenges the institution of work and the ideal worker norm, expects something different of managers and their work behaviors. This prompts a shift in the understanding of identity that is based on and founded in managers as workers (Doherty 2009; Ghidina 1992; Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann, 2006; Thoits 1992).

Meso Level Challenges to Individual Identity

I argue that a similar process is the motivation behind what has been classified as meso level resistance. In these examples, employees and managers argued against FREE through expressions of dissatisfaction with changing aspects of the organization, itself, or to the current work practices and routines of behavior. Again, I argue that this pattern in resistance is not simply a case of a reluctance to attempt something different, that the reason for not wanting something different lies in the self. I claim that this resistance is

rooted in challenges to individual identity and to the construction of the self within the organization in a distinct way. I asserted above that challenges to the institution of work spawned resistance in that it created tension between what is considered the standard of work and how individual identity is partially constructed in how actors meet that criteria. Changing the expectation or evaluation criteria, I argue, created friction for individuals who relied on that classification in their own, socially and organizationally constructed identity.

At the meso level, however, it is evident that work processes, evaluation of the work, and the practical implementation of FREE are under scrutiny. Resistance that has been classified at this level has more to do with trust and control over the actual workday. This resistance focuses on trusting employees to complete the work and actually defining what success and productivity mean. FREE required managers, specifically, to cede control over their employees work time and tasks, no longer allowing for them to have direct supervision of their workers (see Chermack et al. n.d.). Although managers rarely defined these discussions in terms of power and control, this was implied through the numerous discussions of slackers (discussed above). Inherent in this widespread fear, was the idea that employees would suddenly no longer achieve or produce. The expressed concern of managers seemed to be based on having this control over workers and an apparent lack of trust or willingness to develop trust.

Identity is being challenged at this meso level in that participants must make a choice between the construction of the old self and the new worker within the organization, again as Ashforth and Mael 1989 would describe, changing who they are within the organization. Since FREE was an innovation, it received some pushback from

the organization (as this research describes) but also from top leadership, questioning whether *Streamline* was willing to be the first organization to innovate through these particular means. Although that discussion, rooted more in organizational identity is not discussed in this study, it did require early FREE supporters to go out on a limb, so-to-speak, with their support from FREE. In this respect, this meso level resistance is founded in the struggle between the old and new culture and participants' abilities to assert themselves within one of these areas. Competing demands and competing sides of a change fragments a sense of collective identity (Cerulo 1997) and creates conflict (Glynn 2000).

In addition, organizational actors are individuals with achieved statuses within the organization. FREE challenged the identity of these managers through their ability to manage their employees in a different way. This very much altered the definition of what it means to be a manager within the organization and the skills and qualities that define a successful manager. Again, in changing daily work routines and practices, FREE demanded that managers manage differently, challenging their role and identity as a manager. If a manager's team is routinely working off campus, this affects their ability to be seen as a manager and to enact their power, status, and authority within the organization on a daily basis. Requiring managers to cede control is a clear challenge to their identity within the organization.

In a social sense, managers and employees also resisted changes with FREE because they said that it would conflict with the social atmosphere and relationships between coworkers. This relationship-building piece often went hand-in-hand with managers being concerned about trusting their employees to actually do their work. But

we must also consider that the collective identity of the organization and of teams and sub-groups within the organization also help to define individual identity (Cerulo 1997; Durkheim 1933; Poletta and Jasper 2001). Again, I propose that asking these individual managers to change aspects of both their identification with what it means to be a good worker on a global scale and within the organization, as well as their personal identification with their achieved status contributed to resistance to FREE.

Micro Level Challenges to Individual Identity

Resistance at the micro level emerged as individual identities conflicted. This was evident through challenges to the *Change Agents* that were rooted in gender, education, and organizational status. These individual-level events of resistance were more about challenging the people in the room than they were about the bigger-picture aspects of FREE. Some of the major examples of resistance at this level were the manager that claimed *Change Agent 2* would not be able to spell “skeptical,” managers that simply got up and walked out in the middle of the training, and those that called them unqualified and called their surveys “bogus.” Resistance classified at this level clearly has more to do with the gender and status of the change agents that it does with the FREE change or the process of the implementation. These patterns of resistance were focused on legitimacy and on asserting status, power, and control within the training implementation sessions.

Criticizing *Change Agent 2*'s intelligence and her ability to spell is a clear demonstration intended to socially sanction her within the group. This comment was no doubt used to embarrass her in front of the meeting and to challenge her legitimacy

outright. The manager who suggested that *Change Agent 2* “be careful with her language” was also asserting power and authority, as well his legitimacy as a manager, within the training session. In these cases, resistance was about determining who was in charge in the room. The lack of formal authority in smaller group sessions such as these training sessions forces participants to often resort to personal power and status (Fiol et al. 2001). The *Change Agents* were the authority on FREE, but not the highest structural authority present in the room.

Walsh et al., in their 1981 Organization Studies piece on power and advantage, take a conflict-oriented approach. According to these authors, power and advantage characterize all organizational relationships, as actors attempt to negotiate their way through their workdays in relation to one another. Themes from their analyses and propositions about how power and control are represented and enacted in different organizational relationships shed light on this change implementation process and the relationship dynamics of change agents and participants.

The fact that most of the managers that expressed resistance to FREE at this micro or individual-interpersonal level were male emphasizes again the masculine ideal worker norm and power and authority relationships within the organization. Not only were these individuals structurally above the *Change Agents* in the organizational hierarchy, they were also men and they were women. This gender dynamic demonstrated the extent to which these male managers held a higher level of legitimacy and authority over the change agents within these sessions—especially as performed in the presence of lower-level workers. In addition, the *Change Agents* originated from HR, an area of corporate America that is considered a highly feminized field.

Re-iterating some of the previous points on power and control in organizations, these important aspects of organizational interaction ultimately play a role in controlling the change and controlling resistance to the change. Walsh et al. (1981) describe power and control as having the ability to “govern what is recognized as an issue.” Their points about power at the individual actor level concern the control of time and meetings. In their views, powerful actors have control over what goes on the meeting agenda, therefore what ends up being discussed, and ultimately what gets left off and remains unaddressed in the group forum. According to these authors, this keeps the interests of the powerful on the agenda and topics they would prefer not be covered, off. Being in this position also allows them to shape the meeting and guide the discussion toward their desired end.

Resistance: but not for everyone?

Why did we not see more resistance, or why did everyone not resist? The response only reaffirms the argument that resistance is rooted in identity construction. Those who resisted were disproportionately males and disproportionately managers. These are two demographics that I would argue construct their identities most heavily based on their roles as workers and breadwinners (Connell 2005). Men and managers are groups that the ideal worker norm is based on and serves to reproduce advantages within. Although women workers may be most directly impacted by their inability to completely fulfill the ideal worker norm, men are subject to this standard in a different way. Because this permeating institution was created by and for their demographic, they face a different pressure to live up to the expectations. This may generate more resistance on the part of

men and managers, and especially male managers. That does not mean, however, that all men or all managers expressed resistance to FREE. I would also propose that the extent to which participants resisted may be based on how heavily they consider their identity defined by work. Women managers that resisted FREE perhaps defined their identity more as a worker and an ideal worker than others, but more work is needed in this area of gender and resistance to change.

The Role of Innovation Emerges

After classifying and describing these events of resistance, as well as in theorizing the relationship between resistance to change and how individuals construct their identities within the institution of work, their role in organization as a whole, and using power and status at an interpersonal level, it became clear that innovation added another level of complexity. Perhaps one of the biggest issues with these instances of resistance comes from the innovation process. Since this organizational change requires organizational actors not only to alter their ways of thinking and working, abandoning the comfort of their existing routines and processes, it asks them to move to something completely new. This new FREE “work environment” was a novel and un-established concept at the time. It required participants in the initiative to take a leap-of-faith of sorts, trusting that this was a good business decision and that it would improve a variety of factors for the organization. At the same, time, there was no discussion of the potential harmful effects to teams or participants, perhaps causing greater uncertainty.

As it is defined as an innovation, an initiative that is groundbreaking and new, it had no clear end state and no previous research to support it. FREE had never been

implemented before and the previous program, FI, had gone by the wayside. Although somewhat successful in achieving its goals around flexibility, FI also had a number of negatives. The *Change Agents* believed that they had learned from the failures of FI and corrected for those negatives with FREE. Through the migration, however, they were asking the company to simply trust that this would work. The change agents had no real data to support their claims that FREE would improve productivity and improve the company overall.

The business case for FREE was based on changing worker demographics. The *Change Agents* asserted that baby boomers would all be retiring soon and that the Generation Y workers (just graduating from college) were looking forward to a newer standard of work. According to them, this group of talented college-graduates was the technology generation, used to having mobile devices at their fingertips. This pool of potential employees was refusing to be chained to a desk all day and required the freedom to work remotely and in alternative schedules. The *Change Agents* explained to FREE participants in a number of the sessions that if *Streamline* wanted to attract and retain talent from this generation, FREE was the answer.

But, a lack of proof with FREE may have sparked an additional or an increased level of resistance in this case. This was not simply the movement from TQM to SixSigma, a paradigm that others in their field had used and that had a clear end state and expectations. The FREE initiative was totally new and *Streamline* would be the first to attempt such a radical shift in work. The *Change Agents* often claimed that FREE would produce more productive workers, stating that the initiative allows individual employees to work when they feel they do their best work. But a lack of hard evidence for these

claims often left managers unconvinced. The qualities of such an administrative innovation and the lack of past data played an important role in the challenges FREE.

Engaging the Dialectic: Summary of Resistance

Resistance to FREE, as this chapter has established, emerged through varying levels of challenges to individuals' identities, individual identities within the organization, and individuals challenging the identities and status of others. Events of resistance in relation to the macro constructs of FREE and the institutions that FREE challenged were expressed through some participants' assault on the very idea of FREE and to changing the way work operates. This resistance emerged through the many examples of session participants disagreeing with the fundamental principles associated with FREE and their subsequent lack of agreement, participation, and cooperation with the rollout. This resistance, however initiated by the FREE implementation, appeared to originally be motivated in the challenge that FREE posed to individual identity. As identity is constructed partially by and through the institution of work (Albert, Ashforth, and Dutton 2000; Brewer and Gardner 1996), challenging and changing aspects or characteristics of what work means and what it means to be a "good worker" pose subsequent challenges to individuals' identity at work and aspects of identity that are driven by and given meaning through work (Ashforth and Mael 1989).

Thus, challenging the 9-5, face-time, aggressively-present, long-hour ideal worker, also meant challenging aspects of individuals' identities that were rooted in and rewarded by the institutionalized ideal worker. Changing this standard meant asking participants to change their aspirations in the work world. It also meant that individuals

that routinely benefited from attaining or coming close to attaining these characteristics, may not necessarily continue to reap the same rewards in the near future. In terms of those who benefit, employees who live up to the standard and receive the accolades associated with that, such as promotions, fringe, favoritism, are required to learn to work a new “system” based on actually completing the job. Of those that challenged FREE more dramatically in this respect, we might predict that those managers who were especially resistant were those who represented the ideal worker, but were not necessarily the most productive employees.

Resistance to FREE at the meso level can also be explained in terms of challenges to individual identities. Here, many of the same types of motivating factors emerged, but not at the grand scale of what FREE stood for or the concessions about work that it asked employees to make, but the actual logistics of implementation in action. These events of resistance were challenges to actual changes in work processes within the company and within teams, in a much more concrete fashion than the macro challenges to the abstract concept. This is exemplified by altering managerial practices, managers ceding control, and changing the expectations and demonstrations of managerial power and authority.

Micro level resistance was more about the social interaction between participants and the change agents than they do to FREE itself, or concepts (however abstract) related to FREE and the logistics of implementing the system. At this level, events of resistance are targeted directly at the change agents as individuals, questioning their legitimacy within the meeting. Again, identity is the main factor here. The change agents presented a challenge to the above institutions and organizational routines, and therefore their own legitimacy became under scrutiny. Thus, these sessions became a forum for some

managers to demonstrate their power and enact their authority over the change agents. Again, this point illustrates that managers resisted potentially because of the threats to their identity as workers and managers, but that their organizational status, power, and legitimacy was what allowed them to openly express their resistance.

At all levels, but especially so at the micro resistance level, it becomes important to consider that FREE is truly innovative. No other flexible work initiative had called for the dramatic shifts in thinking and culture; no other flexible work initiative was available to everyone and shifted control from the manager to the employee. And again, the legitimacy, know-how, educational attainment, status within the organization, and gender of the change agents became a factor.

Response to Resistance

In most of these cases of resistance, whether participants resisted macro level conceptualizations, meso level changes to their daily work routines, or the legitimacy of the individual change agents at the micro level, resistance was prevalent throughout our two-and-a-half year study of FREE. Another subject that this dissertation will tackle in the remaining chapters is how this resistance was received and actions that were, or in some cases were not, taken in light of these events of resistance. Although this chapter mainly focused on the defenders of the status quo (Kellogg 2011) and focused very little on the actions of the change agents, there was eventual action taken which I see as a direct response to resistance.

Immediately following events of resistance, the *Change Agents* typically made an effort to disregard the resistance and move on. We have numerous examples of how

Change Agent 1 and *Change Agent 2* “kept cool” during particularly heated exchanges. Rarely did these two change agents directly address the resistance or engage the resisters, themselves. This lack of engagement is no doubt due to their ambiguous role in the status hierarchy within the organization and an uncertainty in asserting power or control due to this lack of structural clarity (Knights and Willmott 1989). As individuals of a higher status practiced resistance and often times personally offended the change agents, they had little choice rather than to accept the comments or ignore the interaction altogether. This is a reflection of what Fiol et al. (2001) referred to as actors with power having the “ability or potential to influence.” The *Change Agents* were keenly and routinely made aware of their lack of power within these training sessions. Although they had the legitimacy to control the meeting agenda and the topics of conversation (Valley and Thompson 1998; Walsh et al. 1981), they did not have the power and authority to silence defenders who had more status and or seniority. Figure 3 depicts the beginning of this resistance-response process.

In this respect, much of the resistance that emerged went seemingly unchallenged by the Change Agents within the session itself. Overall, however, the FREE implementation began to adapt, being altered slightly time after time in an attempt to head off or address any potential resistance *before* it emerged. Subsequent sessions, as time went on, incorporated new discussion topics and activities, and omitted others. Because, as Walsh et al. (1981) describe, one thing that the *Change Agents* did have control over and could influence was the meeting agenda. It was completely within their power to alter the FREE training as they saw fit. This next chapter describes how these

change agents did exactly that and theorizes a link between resistance and changes to the FREE training and implementation process.

Chapter Six: FREE: Subject and Object of Change

It is fair to say that the *Change Agents* should have expected a certain amount of resistance to FREE. They knew they had developed a radical initiative that would prompt some serious reactions that the more “old-school,” veteran employees and managers may exhibit. What I would suspect it is also fair to say is that they did not plan on how FREE, itself, would eventually change as a result. This chapter does not describe radical changes where the essence of, or the ideas behind, the initiative are severely impacted. What this chapter does depict is how resistance to the change (or, even more importantly, the innovation) sparked changes in the implementation process. Within this process is a link between expressions of resistance in the training sessions and how the FREE training and implementation was adapted.

In this sense, the training was altered to reflect the concerns of resisters. Several methods were employed here. These consisted of: modes of distraction, controlling the meeting agendas, building answers to questions into subsequent training, removing typically contested topics or phrases, holding additional meetings for highly resistant teams, and other means of controlling resistance before it emerged in the sessions. These efforts subsequently prompted changes to the implementation of the innovation. Although seemingly inconsequential at the outset, the fact that this process occurs documents the power and influence of resistance to change, first hand. Important to highlight is the fact that resistance plays an influential role in the overall change process and has the ability to impact and alter the change implementation process.

The purpose of this chapter is to document and describe how FREE changed and adapted, highlighting changes to the internal innovation implementation process. These concessions and adaptations are based on the operation of the three dialectic processes, the macro, meso, and micro dialectic processes described in the previous chapter. As that chapter demonstrated, resistance often emerged as a struggle between individuals' understanding of the larger institutions in their lives and in their own individual identities striving for legitimacy. This struggle for legitimacy, I will argue in the pages below, is what prompted adaptations to the FREE implementation process. Recall the reflexive questions from the previous chapter, which stated 'are we, as an organization, ready to challenge the rules of corporate America?' 'are we, the organization, ready to change the culture and ways of operating, doing daily work?' and 'are we, individuals, ready to 1) alter our own understanding of who we are as a worker and 2) accept the information and legitimacy of the change agents?' These questions are all anchored in the legitimacy of the organization of work and achieving the ideal worker standard. I argued in the previous chapter that individual employees and managers struggle through a reflexive process where they encounter legitimacy questions at these three levels of abstraction. The changes to FREE are also based on these reflexive processes, as the *Change Agents* conducted evaluations of their own legitimacy in the face of resistance to FREE. This research proposes that these changes and adaptations to FREE came out of this resistance from managers, that resistance prompted the change agents to refine their presentation of information, activities, and discussions throughout the FREE implementation.

In addition to tracking the changes associated with resistance, I examine the overall outcome (within the scope of the study) of this resistance and change relationship.

Previous research describes the organizational and change facilitation-related benefits of resistance to change, concluding that resistance is not often truly resistance (Piderit 2000), and I find comparable results. Here, the question of whether these events of resistance truly express a resistance to the innovation versus an opposition that promotes a beneficial dialogue, is also discussed.

Resistance-Change Feedback

The previous chapter documented events of resistance to FREE at the macro, meso, and micro levels of abstraction. Resistance, regardless of the form, appeared to spark changes to the FREE implementation process. There are immediate and clear connections between several instances of resistance and changes documented within the FREE implementation. The section below will describe confirmed cases of such adaptations to FREE, describing instances where the *Change Agents* indicated to us that FREE had been altered in light of resistance. This section also describes changes to FREE that we witnessed and qualitative connections that link these changes had to events of resistance. As Table 1 depicts, in our 2.5 year study of FREE, we documented 51 sessions that exhibited changes to the FREE training and implementation process out of the 144 sessions and seven additional conversations that are included in this analysis.

As Table 1 shows, a Initiation session (P1) in April of 2005 was the first session that we attended. For purposes of this analysis, these constituted the baseline measures of what the FREE training entailed and general behavior of managers and employees in these sessions. In our second session (P2) the first instance of resistance is documented. It is difficult to judge how much resistance the *Change Agents* had received prior to this.

What we did know, generally speaking and not documented in these sessions, was that several high-level leaders were opposed to the FREE implementation. Our first documented event of resistance emerged in this first Language Session that we attended where the resistance was classified as resistance to FREE at the micro level. Three sessions later, we again observe resistance to FREE, and we also document the first change we witnessed in the FREE implementation. This begins a pattern (again see Table 1) where trends in resistance and response emerge. As evident in this table, resistance and change very rarely occur within the same session. What is apparent here is that when resistance occurred in groups or chunks of sessions over time, patterns of change occur in the following sessions. Then, as the FREE training unfolded over time, more events of resistance lead to more changes to FREE. Each case of change does not necessarily link to a specific act of resistance, but more that mounting resistance to certain topics causes a change or re-direction in how those topics are framed. Based on these data, the process of resistance-change operates by events of resistance first prompting a change in the FREE training, followed by the incorporation of that change if successful in reducing resistance. If resistance continued to emerge, some changes were disregarded and a new attempt at framing followed.

Changes in the Presentation of Information

At several points in the FREE implementation, researchers noted changes in the information and statistics being presented. This included the addition of different or newer statistics and changes to definitions or examples. Changes to the presentation of

information also took the form of new surveys and survey results, as well as new ‘scripts’ and definitions.

Information in the Sessions

Beginning with a Restructure Session early on in the study, the researcher documented the introduction of new statistics on being overworked in America (P13). The *Change Agents* used these statistics in presenting the business and community cases for the FREE initiative. The statistics were used to *convince* participants of the need to change the workplace. These data were an obvious effort to make the case for implementing FREE in the organization. Since the *Change Agents* had no FREE-specific data, they relied on statistics about flexible work in general. In another Restructure Session that occurred 15 days later (P22) the *Change Agents* had added even more statistics from the Work and Family Institute. This demonstrates that their FREE message and the business case for FREE needed more emphasis, that the audience needed more convincing. This further solidified the business case for FREE, often challenged by managerial resistance to FREE at the macro level. These changes followed a discussion about whether changing the state of work in *Streamline*, thus challenging the social construction of work in corporate America, was something the managers were willing to move forward with implementing.

There were several other changes to statistics and studies that the *Change Agents* presented throughout the training. In P118, they presented additional statistics:

Change Agent 3 [a project manager that the *Change Agents* had hired that occasionally conducted training] said that the next slides would be a review of the guideposts, and mentioned that they now had some stats and

“brainteasers mixed in.” I didn’t get down all of the new stats that were added in, but here are some of them:

- Children are most likely to become victims of crime between the hours of 3-6pm
- 44% of households have no regular after school care
- 52% of women and 62% (?) of men say they have no decisions in how to do their work
- “80% of people feel stressed on the job”

Those were at least some of the stats that I got down.

These statistics were most likely an effort to sell the individual case for FREE. These statistics involved the family and family time, and were no doubt an effort to demonstrate how FREE can help balance work and family. P13 was another session that also introduced new stats, as well as P22. These were also cases where new statistics from the Working Families Institute as well as other nationally known research institutions and universities were introduced to help make the case for implementing FREE.

In the same session P118 Discussion Session, *Change Agent 3* also introduced changes to the Guideposts. She described the changes as part of an effort to *streamline* their message:

When *Change Agent 3* had finished, she introduced the [guidepost] slides. She said that this was a new more “crisper” version of the guideposts that [this group] had seen before. The beginning slides were mostly the same with the “People have complete autonomy...” and that they can do “whatever, whenever, wherever.”

Similar to the introduction to new statistics, these changes to the guideposts seemed to be a revision to their implementation methods; making the training clearer, easier, more straightforward. Along with these changes to the information presented often came new and improved PowerPoint slides:

This was the first Initiation that I've been to in a while. There were some change ups—the impediment triangle, short videos, getting people to tackle the guideposts and say in their own words what they do and don't mean.

Change Agent 2 and *Change Agent 1* also added cartoons and other visuals around similar times. With new PowerPoints came better visuals and more polished messages. The change agents began incorporating clever Dilbert cartoons from the newspaper in their presentation. The use of cartoons and examples from popular media also flowed in and out of their presentations. Our researcher commented to *Change Agent 2* on the new cartoons, to which *Change Agent 2* responded:

She [*Change Agent 2*] said that I probably knew the session by heart and I told her no, that she's constantly adding things to it, so there's always something new and mentioned the Dilbert cartoons.

As technology became more and more of an issue with teams and problems with technology seemed to become a barrier to implementing FREE, *Change Agent 2* and *Change Agent 1* added more technology help as FREE progressed. They added a 'Technology Tips & Tricks' handout (P13) during the Restructure Session. Once this handout was well-received by a few groups, it became accepted as a part of the FREE implementation process and was handout at every Restructure Session that followed.

Assessment Measures and Results

The 'assessment tool,' discussed in the Assessment Session, one of the first official meetings with managers of individual teams, was another form of information and presentation that shifted over time. In P116, our notes describe a different survey and presentation of results:

Change Agent 3 noted that the questions are the same, but that they are phrased differently, “either ‘I do’ or ‘my manager does’” *Change Agent 3* said.

They went through the first section on the environment and there weren’t many questions from the audience [managers]. Had they always had the comparative mean in there?...the one that compares to the rest of *Streamline* people who took the assessment tool? I didn’t remember having seen this before.

Here, *Change Agent 3*, the project manager who occasionally facilitated the training, openly described a change that they made. Our researcher also noticed that the results and the output, as well as the comparative mean, were different from previous sessions.

Scripts

Toward the end of our observation period, *Change Agent 2* and *Change Agent 1* began to formalize the training and standardize their message even further. They developed scripts for each of the sessions that covered, in detail, the activities, examples, and language that should be used in the sessions. One of our researchers first noticed this in a Manager Initiation Session:

This session is SCRIPTED. Much more than the Manager Initiation used to be. Some of it works really well, I think, and I see the value of knowing exactly what you have covered with different groups of leaders. They have worked hard at clarifying and simplifying their “message” and then illustrating it with role plays and activities. But at times it seemed almost too slick to me.

The idea behind implementing scripts was probably an effort to streamline the message and standardize the discussions and responses to questions in the sessions. Using these scripts, the *Change Agents* had to strategize and write down exactly what they wanted to

say and how they wanted their message conveyed, something that we did not have evidence of them doing prior to this.

Changes in Language and Time

The qualitative data also documents changes in language that occurred throughout the FREE implementation. Whether these changes consisted of naming or title changes, emergent language, or revisions to existing terms, numerous changes were made to the FREE language. Adapting over time and through sessions, *Change Agent 2* and *Change Agent 1* changed the FREE terminology to appease the group, incorporate jokes for levity, and clarify their argument. These adaptations flowed through and between sessions where managers resisted FREE and perhaps needed more convincing as to the merits of the initiative.

Work Unstructure

Early on, the *Change Agents* began referring to the “Restructure” session as “Unstructure.” This was in an effort to describe their process of the de-institutionalization of the old work culture. Later on during the FREE implementation, the Restructure (or “unstructure”) Session became transformed into a new, different session called the Group Implement Session (as introduced in P104). The *Change Agents* changed the name of and activities within in this session because the name Restructure, or even Unstructure was confusing to participants. The *Change Agents* were not necessarily restructuring the teams’ work, nor completely undesigning it either. They

decided on Group Implement because it more accurately reflected the point of the session—to work on the team culture and work habits, not the work itself.

'Language'

The language about Language also morphed over time, through new terms or changes to existing terms and definitions. Most of these new terms were focused on Language—the concept that depicts negative language used to judge other employees in the workplace. The Language Card activity involved volunteers reading a statement to another participant and “Languaging” them. Some examples of Language that the

Change Agents routinely used in these sessions are:

- “Gee, smokers get a lot of breaks.”
- “It’s 10am and you’re just getting in. I wish I had your job.”
- “Can’t your husband stay home when your kid is sick?”
- “Another vacation? Didn’t you just get back from one?”
- “How did she get promoted?! She’s never here!”

These are all judgments regarding how coworkers spend their time that use an accusatory tone to imply that some employees do not work as hard as others. The *Change Agents* raised the point that smokers can have meetings with other smokers while they are outside smoking, that just because an employee arrives at 10am does not mean that he or she was not working earlier that morning or late the previous night. Essentially, they argued that the company, and other employees, should not care about any of these behaviors as long as the work continues to get done.

The *Change Agents* indicated to teams that they would all become “environmental Language eradicators” after they finished the Language Session. In one session, a

participant gave this the term the acronym “ELE’s” and the room erupted in laughter (P19). The *Change Agents* continued to use this acronym from this date forward, often putting it in PowerPoint slide-shows and writing it on the whiteboard in these sessions. In this same session, while discussing how to respond to Language, a participant stated that he would begin explaining why he was late. Another participant commented that his statement was “Language justification” and the room again exploded in laughter. The *Change Agents* continued to use this term throughout the training as well. Other terms that emerged in a similar fashion included “Language backlash (P49),” “third-party Language (P62),” “Language-Buster (another term for an ELE; P70),” “Language-off (P73),” “Language Conspiracy (P73),” and “BackLanguage (P73),” to name a few. Language-Buster took hold for a while (11 sessions) and then morphed again. *Change Agent 1* coined the term “smart mob,” a term for a group of environmental Language eradicators or ELE’s, and used this phrase in 11 subsequent training sessions. This terminology was well-received in the session where it emerged (P63) and *Change Agent 1* continued to use these words throughout the FREE training. Although this may have been an attempt at creating a coalition for FREE support within the company, as the term ‘mob’ implies, this type of action never took hold within the organization. Groups seemed to find the term amusing (perhaps an effective joke that reduces resistance, see below) but they did not take the idea seriously. Part of “the cool club” was another such terms that *Change Agent 1* enacted. We counted 15 sessions where she used this term. During our interviews and conversations with *Change Agent 1* and *Change Agent 2*, we did not have the opportunity to ask specific questions regarding their changes in

terminology. What was apparent to our researchers at the time was that this seemed to be an effective way of on-boarding teams with FREE.

As revisions to Language terminology became more prevalent, the *Change Agents* also refined their approach to explaining and demonstrating what Language is and how it is enacted in the company. During a Restructure (P61) a discussion of three types of Language emerged. This was clearly planned prior to the session and was not an impromptu change. *Change Agent 2* described the types:

Change Agent 2 said that Language falls into “three buckets.” The first is “your mouth,” Language that comes out of it. The second is “knowing how to respond when Language is thrown at you.” ...The third type of Language was “a little more challenging” *Change Agent 2* said. “It’s when you hear Language about someone else” and you have two “choices” either to “give in and keep the conversation Language-like” or to “stop and educate them.” Victor added that you could also “rip them” and laughed. *Change Agent 2* smiled and acknowledged that possibility.

This discussion of types or ‘buckets’ of Language was refined as the sessions went on. In as little as 6 days later, the change agents were explaining the types of Language in yet another form:

Change Agent 1 started this meeting off by telling them (and writing on the board) that the outcome is for them to become a “Smart Mob.” That they would be able to “identify Language when you here, think, see, smell it.” And that they would all “become environmental Language eradicators.” (P63).

This constant revision of the Language throughout the implementation no doubt aided in effectively communicating their ideas and the desired outcome of ‘eradicating’ it from the workplace. Beginning with the group-suggested terminology, and ending with a

revised, clearer presentation of Language *Change Agent 2* and *Change Agent 1* adapted this language over time.

While some of the changes in language were intended to provide clarity, other changes in language and phrasing were a distraction. The *Change Agents* created multiple names for other aspects of the FREE training that were humorous, and often emergent from the participation of managers and employees in the more positive training sessions. I argue that these changes were implemented to answer to resistance to FREE on two levels: 1) these changes were intended as jokes or to make groups laugh, lightening the mood and reducing anxiety and thus resistance (Gallob and Levine 1967; Ribordy et al. 1980), and 2) these changes were used to demonstrate the compliance of the other groups that developed the term. In these cases, jokes were meant to cajole groups into laughing and having fun, and when *Change Agent 1* and *Change Agent 2* could indicate that Manager X's team came up with this new term, it exhibited that team's compliance to other groups.

Activities

Activities within the sessions began to change as well in response to resistance by participants. These types of changes included omitting a discussion or video, to overhauling the way some of the activities are conducted in the sessions. It also included the addition of new activities.

The End of the Restructure: Motivational Video and Commitments

Restructure originally included a Franklin Covey, Inc. video at the end of the session. This video prompted participants to think about their lives as a whole, including work and non-work aspects, and to imagine what is truly important to them. This was a ten-minute, highly introspective video that often brought participants to tears. Our notes describe the video:

The video is short and is filled with a lot of images of family and friends, as well as peaceful scenes and flowers. Softy music plays while several phrases come across the screen. Phrases like: “life is short, leave a legacy,” “what makes life worth living?” “love,” “how do I show love?” “where are the answers?” “what do I need to unlearn?” “how will I be remembered?” “to live, to love, to learn,” and “leave a legacy” (P8).

Change Agent 2 and *Change Agent 1* also included a handout with the video (not clear if this came along with the video or was designed by them) and asked that session participants to take a minute after the video and review the questions. The researcher recalls from the first Restructure our group attended:

After the video finishes, everyone gets up and leaves. Very few people write on their papers, but everyone takes it with them. Sam and I offer to help *Change Agent 1* pack up the room and she gives me a copy of the handout. It has 3 questions on it, they are:

“If you could change one thing in your life right now, what would it be?”

“What do you want your legacy to be?”

“When you’re gone, what do you want people to say about how you lived your life?” (P13).

Over time and as the sessions went on, the video was occasionally skipped in some groups. Other groups were shown the video, but the session ended without the handout. Occasionally it was clear that groups had been over the scheduled time and

there simply was not time for the video. On other occasions, *Change Agent 2* and *Change Agent 1* seemed to skip the video intentionally. These more intentional times were associated with Restructures that posed resistance. It was clear that the change agents would use the video in groups that had a positive session, presumably to close on a warm and fuzzy note and get the group feeling good about the upcoming changes. It was also clear that during more heated sessions riddled with frustration and tense discussion, *Change Agent 1* and *Change Agent 2* did not even bother with the video. Eventually the video was dropped altogether when other changes were made (see below) (see for example, sessions: P23, P25, P26, P29, P39, P78, and P87).

Another activity from the Restructure followed a similar adjustment. Toward the end of the session, typically before the video was played, the *Change Agents* asked session participants to make a commitment to doing something differently with their work and lives. They asked each member of the group to commit to a change such as working off campus for a full day, going to a movie during the day, not setting an alarm clock to get up in the morning, for some examples. Asking participants to make a commitment to FREE was also an activity that the *Change Agents* included in constructive and optimistic groups and omitted in resistant groups (see sessions: P8, P9, P24, P26, P31, P32, P33, P35, P39, and P78). We observed 41 total Restructures/Group Implements where the change agents used this new activity.

Language Activities

When the revisions to the descriptions, such as ELE and Languagebuster, became more prevalent, the *Change Agents* also added to and revised many Language-related activities. For instance, they introduced different and more colorful latex-free gloves:

Change Agent 2 goes over to the Language can and gets out the gloves. They have begun using purple gloves, which are much more fun. Seriously, groups get excited about the gloves... Keith, a big man, was concerned that the glove would fit him. He joked that the glove wouldn't fit. Everyone laughed (P60).

Again, this seemed to be an effort to streamline the Language discussion and provide levity in the sessions. In the same session, *Change Agent 2* and *Change Agent 1* also changed the number of Language cards in the activity:

She passed [the Language cards] out to six of the group members [they decreased the number of cards, it used to be 8, but I think they realized that some of them were repetitive] (P60).

In this example, the change agents addressed the session activity and suited it better to the goals of the session. Refining the Language cards would potentially accomplish the same task while leaving more room for questions or other activities.

About one month after these changes to Language activities, the change agents added another activity to the Language Session. At the end of this training, after the main activities and discussions took place, the *Change Agents* added a 1-10 scale temperature-gauging activity (beginning with P72). They began closing the Language Session by asking participants to consider their “comfort with being a Languagebuster,” where 1 is not at all and 10 is totally comfortable. This new activity continued throughout the

remaining training sessions that we observed. We observed 33 subsequent sessions where *Change Agent 1* and *Change Agent 2* used this activity.

Guidepost Activity

The *Change Agents* added a second 1-10 scale, temperature-taking activity to assess participant reactions in the sessions. Similar to the comfort with being a “Languagebuster” activity, the *Change Agents* began asking participants about their comfort with the Guideposts. Recall from the previous chapter, that the Guideposts had often been a source of tension, with managers expressing their concerns openly. This new activity occurred immediately after the guideposts were shown in the Manager Initiation Session. Once the guideposts were presented, the *Change Agents* would then ask how close these behaviors were to how the team is currently working.

FREE Branding

During the latter half of our study, the *Change Agents* had moved out of *Streamline* and had begun to continue implementing FREE as consultants, not as employees. They created laminated posters that they hung during sessions, they got a new Language bucket (where they kept and transferred all of their training materials), they created new eye-catching Language cards for participants to read from during the Language activity, and new session materials in general (see P78, P117, P122, P143).

One specific material the *Change Agents* created and used in these sessions was a “No Language” button. The change agents began wearing these buttons for the first time in P61:

I noticed that *Change Agent 1* had a “No Language” button on her purse. I complimented her on it and asked if they were handing them out already. The buttons were red and yellow with “No Language” written on it. She said no, that she couldn’t hand them out yet.

It wasn’t until about five months later, in a Language Session, that our team first saw *Change Agent 2* and *Change Agent 1* hand them out to session participants. Participants seemed to like the buttons and we did see employees wear them sometimes. It did not appear to be as effective as the change agents had perhaps hoped. People wore them for a while, but it did not become the movement that we thought the *Change Agents* had planned on.

This FREE branding often occurred alongside changes to the information presented. Recall from earlier in this chapter that the *Change Agents* introduced new statistics and altered forms of their message throughout the training. Branding coincided with many of these changes in information. Both appeared to be an effort to streamline their presentation.

New Sessions

The *Change Agents* also began adding different types of sessions, some as needed and some institutionalized, throughout the FREE implementation. They added sessions to check-in with teams that were 3 months out from their Discussion Session, panels of FREE experts, meetings with managers and HR, and other types of meetings that helped facilitate FREE in these teams.

Check-Ins

Toward the middle of our study, the *Change Agents* also implemented a Check-In Session that followed a few months after the Discussion Session. This additional session was created to reconnect with the team and to be sure that the group is operating with FREE correctly. This Check-In was beneficial to make sure that FREE is running smoothly within these teams, to make sure that their FREE message is consistent and maintained, and to squander any resistance that was apparent in the team.

Leader-Only Sessions

In another example of change to the FREE implementation, P52 documented a Leadership-Only Language Session (never implemented before) because the leadership on this team was having an unusually difficult time accepting FREE. Because managers on this team had been so resistant in the earlier sessions, the *Change Agents* dedicated a Language Session to just the managers, before the same information would be brought before their teams. The *Change Agents* also confirmed that this was a direct result of resistance in the department's management. They routinely offered these Leadership-Only Language sessions with other teams. They also developed a Leadership-Only Restructure/Group Implement to other teams that preferred that the management get a preview of information that would be presented to their employees. Leadership-Only Discussion Sessions also became common.

During one Leadership-Only Language Session, our team noticed that the session activities had been altered. As we sat in the room prior to the meeting and watched

Change Agent 1 get the room set up, she was frustrated that she could not find the Leadership Language cards for the Language role play activity:

[*Change Agent 1*] was setting up her laptop and was frantically looking for the Leadership Language cards, which are apparently different from the regular Language cards. I hadn't noticed this in previous sessions, so I thought maybe this was something new. Maybe they made specific cards for the leadership teams that would be more pertinent to their work and goals.

This was the second of only a few of these new Leadership-Only sessions that we attended and we had not noticed, prior to this, that these Language cards were different. Thus, the *Change Agents* had begun planning and executing the leader-only sessions differently than they would in front of employees.

Teach-Ins

This was another new type of session, added mid-way through our data collection. This session (initiated by P76), was an open forum for managers of teams that were migrating through FREE or had previously migrated that wanted to get a refresher. The *Change Agents* encouraged managers to take advantage of this session, but it was not required as part of the FREE process. The researcher describes the first Teach-In:

This was the first teach-in session that FREE has ever had. *Change Agent 1* told me that she was sort of making it up as she went...

The group seemed to have some reservations about FREE but by the end most people seemed to be on-board... They were thinking through how it would work instead of outright rejecting it.

There were new slides used that I had never seen before, where they detailed what the *managers* role was in FREE and the current culture. These would be great to get from *Change Agent 1* (P76).

Other Outside Meetings

In addition to the new and official sessions that were added to the FREE implementation process, other non-standardized meetings and sessions took place. These were typically called ‘Team xxx meeting’ on the calendar and tended to be general discussions about the FREE implementation in these teams. These types of supplementary meetings only took place when a team was struggling with their migration and needed some additional guidance on how to implement FREE. Several teams incorporated these sessions; typically teams that struggled with management buy-in (see for example P84; P53; P126).

One team was having such difficulty moving forward that their HR generalist also became involved. This team had several difficult managers that were anti-FREE (recall the managers from the previous chapter that claimed ‘the company won’t survive this’ and called the *Change Agents*’s surveys “bogus”). The main issue with this team was that they employees, who had been told by the VP and SVP that they were moving to FREE, felt stalled by their direct supervisors who clearly were not on board. The *Change Agents* then conducted this meeting between some of these lower-level employees, their HR generalist (an HR representative that is assigned to a particular team; often conducts team training and employee and development team-building). To complicate things further, HR generalists, both the specific ones that worked with this group and HR as a whole, were also difficult to get on board with FREE. The *Change Agents* met with the HR generalists and representatives from this team to help provide further support for FREE. We were able to attend one of these meetings:

On the way over, *Change Agent 2* told me a little more about the problems they're having with FREE generalists. They're having problems with them being resistant to FREE...The HR people were several (10 minutes) late and the *Change Agents* joked that they weren't coming. Then said that if this happened, it would be really important for my notes-that they're so resistant they won't even come.

The *Change Agents* also organized a session solely for non-exempt workers (hourly employees who must submit time cards). Because many of the tenants of FREE ran counter to their required work processes (tracking hours, logging time) and because many of these employees felt their work required them to be physically in the office (particularly administrative assistants) the *Change Agents* held a session to address their needs specifically (P111).

Outside Prep Work

One of the changes that the *Change Agents* also implemented was adding a Panel. Sometimes the panel was its own session and sometimes that panel was part of a Initiation or Manager Initiation Session. The *Change Agents* had long envisioned using a panel of individuals who had been through the FREE training and who had worked in this new environment for some time. From the beginning, they had used volunteer participants to come and discuss their experiences with FREE and be part of a Q&A for newly-adopting teams. Although there was certainly some coaching from the beginning, in July of 2005, *Change Agent 1* organized a "Panel Prep" meeting (P44) to do some more coaching with panel participants. We were able to observe this prep meeting as well. *Change Agent 1* directly mentioned that they needed to do more work in preparing for leader resistance and wanted to help the panel prepare some canned answers.

[*Change Agent 1*] started the meeting by asking them, and Coworker 20 specifically, if they knew why they had this group. Coworker 20 said “consistency” and *Change Agent 1* said yes. “And [*Change Agent 2*] and I can’t be the only two people with this point of view on what it [FREE] is.” [*Change Agent 1* said] they need to put out “consistent message” to keep the change moving. “Right now, people are glotting on to snippets to hold to the old culture, and they want people to hear that for FREE too.” So she asked them to “Go ahead and pretend you’re on the panel and we’re the... I was going to say assholes [laugh]... but we’re the people...” I said “the skeptics?” and *Change Agent 1* said yes, the skeptics who are asking them questions.

In this case, the *Change Agents* were making an effort to not only strategize and streamline their own statements, as they did with the scripts, but others’ responses as well. They spent time and effort developing responses that their panelists could give, coaching how they wanted them to respond to difficult questions or confrontation.

Bigger-Picture Changes

From FREE to FREE

Perhaps one of the biggest changes that we witnessed was the change from FREE to *FREE*, the change agents decided to change some of the terminology in the FREE acronym. This did not result in a substantive change to the FREE concept, but refined the name. This came as a shock to our research team as *Change Agent 1* began using this new term in one team’s Initiation Session:

Change Agent 1 introduces FREE, [and described the new wording that kept the same acronym], saying that the previous terminology “was too squishy and it was a little too easy to wiggle out of it” (P115).

This major change in language was determined to further clarify the vision of the new work environment. Saying that managers and employees could “wiggle out” of the results-oriented piece was highly receptive.

Restructure to Group Implement

Another major change in the FREE implementation was the shift from the Restructure Session to a Group Implement Session. The *Change Agents*, in an effort to restructure their training, changed the name of this session, as well as a number of activities and discussions within the session. In a Manager Initiation Session, where the *Change Agents* walk managers through the FREE training implementation, *Change Agent I* introduced the Restructure as a Group Implement:

Change Agent I went through the Language agenda in detail, saying that they make lists about what they think FREE is, how it makes them feel, and about the current culture and how it makes them feel. The resulting gap between the future state and the current state is what they have to work on closing and the first impediment they learn about is language. Language sessions give them their first tool. Next, she said is the “Group Implement” [new term!!!] and that here, they learn about two more impediments, time and beliefs about work. They also learn about more tools that are available-outlook, laptops, etc. and really get serious about “how to operationalize moving forward.” After this session, they were ready to “go live” which she said did not mean they were already there (at end state) but that they could “start trying some things.”

This was the first time we had heard of the change. With this change in name, the activities slowly morphed over time as well. P78 documented the first addition of the FREE Feud Activity, where the room was divided into 2 teams and these teams compete in a Family Feud type of game. The *Change Agents* used bells to have one representative from each team ‘buzz’ in to answer a question about FREE. If the representative answered the question incorrectly, the other team was given the opportunity to ‘steal’ the point by answering with the correct response. Example questions:

Q: If you leave at 10 am for haircut, what do you do?

1. lie
2. leave campus happily

3. sneak out the back door

Q: You decided to work from home today, what do you do?

1. email all of your customers and team members to let them know you are home
2. take a vacation day
3. nothing

According to the FREE philosophy, #2 and #3 are the correct answers. We also noticed that, in this first Feud session, that the *Change Agents* did not ask for commitments to trying something new.

The FREE Feud Activity became popular. Teams enjoyed it. Groups seemed to laugh at the introduction of the activity and really get into the team-aspect of the game. The *Change Agents* asked teams to come up with their own team name and write it on the board. Most groups laughed and jokes as they created team names and really got into the spirit of the game. Although the *Change Agents* typically conducted the Calendar Game first, as they always had, they had to be sure they left enough room for Feud. Eventually, the Calendar Game went by the wayside, was retired for good (P 131) and FREE Feud took the bulk of the time.

The Franklin-Covey, Inc. video was also changed in P131. They no longer watched a teary, touching video at the end of the session. A new, uplifting, happy, and markedly shortened, video was played at the opening of the session before the guideposts were re-introduced.

Culture Discussion

Perhaps the most prevalent change to FREE was the discussion of the culture within *Streamline*. Permeating all sessions types and meetings, the dialectical model that

pitted the current culture (based not only on this organization, but on corporate America's culture) against the *Change Agents*'s vision for FREE, this discussion received much criticism. Thinking back to examples of resistance at the macro level from the previous chapter, this discussion of the current culture was heavily critiqued. Throughout our two-and-a-half year study of FREE, how the *Change Agents* framed this discussion, as well as the visuals and examples they used, adapted continually.

After our first couple of observations, one researcher notes a new way of framing the current and desired culture:

[*Change Agent 1*] said yesterday's Language had been great. She mentioned that they were doing Language a little differently now and said that I'd seen the new stuff. It turns out that what Sam and I saw *Change Agent 2* do with the "today's environment" and then "Language" (in the river) and then "FREE" (on the far bank) was not *Change Agent 2*'s own version of Language but instead a "script" change that they were trying out.

Because it had gone so well with [two other] groups, they were now using that on the board. *Change Agent 1* had then "taken it up a level" to have practices in today's environment at the top left, then beliefs that reinforce those practices on the bottom left. The Language section now has Language at the top and how it makes people feel at the bottom.

Change Agent 1 also mentioned that they're not having people write down their own Language anymore but instead using a bunch of laminated cards that have Language written on them. She said that this was an example of them continually developing their program, making changes every few weeks.

This quote first highlights that the change agents constantly adapted their implementation process in light of manager resistance to the culture discussion, and that they were intentionally doing so. *Change Agent 1*'s comment about changing their "scripts" (this occurred before they actually had created real scripts to read from) also acknowledges

that, when a change worked well, it was implemented with subsequent groups. This description was used in the next few meetings before it went by the wayside. The *Change Agents* vacillated between something like this and their previous description of the culture, then settled on making lists of adjectives and feelings for both the current culture and FREE culture. The visual with the river was replaced by simply putting current culture words and feelings on one end of the whiteboard and the FREE words and feelings across the board, on the other side of the room.

This was the first of many changes to how the *Change Agents* discussed the culture. About 4 months later, we observed the next big change to their culture discussion:

I've noticed that lately they've revised how they talk about the current culture in these meetings. *Change Agent 2* told me that they've run into some trouble with groups that think the current culture is mostly great (i.e: any meeting that [manager's name] has been in). She and *Change Agent 1* decided that they needed to frame that discussion a little differently in order to satisfy those that don't see the culture as "bad." (P67).

The *Change Agents* often began using terms and phrases intended to be less critical of the *Streamline* culture, itself, and frame this as a problem that is much larger than the company alone. They would make comments like:

Change Agent 1 said: "*Streamline* is, like, a totally fun, kick butt place. We're not trying to change that, we're just trying to make it more talent powered..." (P63).

"*Streamline* is gonna be *Streamline*, but we're gonna make it better..." (P67).

Next *Change Agent 2* talks about how great *Streamline* is and how fun the culture is. She says that every culture has their subcultures though. She says that "a culture is a set of unwritten rules, norms, and behaviors. At *Streamline* we have a culture about how things get done...what are they?" (P70).

This kind of caveat of ‘*Streamline* has great culture now, BUT...’ even became anticipated by our research team:

Next *Change Agent 1* says; “describe for me the culture today.” *She says she needs to say one thing first because it **always** comes up; “Streamline is a great place to be...there’s some systematic issues that are making us feel anxious and guilty that we need to get rid of...” (P81).*

Thus the original framing of their argument, that came from a strict dialectical model, was breaking down over time. The stark contrast of the current culture pitted against a new and fantastic way of working was becoming muted over time. It had changed to a description of how what they currently have is great, but could be improved upon. The *Change Agents* then framed FREE as an initiative that could help improve what they had already got. This do doubt came out of the critical responses that the *Change Agents* had received to how they were discussing the culture and the organization. Their efforts to tone-down the criticisms about their current organization proved successful. This also “proves” that resistance can impact the change.

Pattern of Change

This chapter began by describing changes to FREE that occurred throughout our study. These ranged from more subtle or basic changes in language that was used, information that was presented, and sessions that were offered, to more major changes like revamping one of the sessions, changing from FREE to *FREE*, and the description of the culture and breakdown of the dialectical model. Because there were so many changes, as described earlier, it was simpler to begin describing changes as classified into different types and not necessarily chronologically. But, if we examine Table 1 in more

detail, the real process emerges and the influential role of resistance becomes clearer.

Almost every change that the *Change Agents* made can be traced back to an instance of resistance or multiple instances of resistance described in the previous chapter.

As Figure 3 depicts, resistance was sparked by some characteristic of the FREE initiative that challenged individuals' identification of the self as a worker (macro), as an actor in the organization (meso), or as an individual within a social setting (micro), (as also demonstrated in Figure 2 in the previous chapter). This resistance was expressed in the sessions where the *Change Agents* were forced to give an immediate reaction. As the previous chapter established, due to their gender and organizational status, the change agents did not engage resisters, but typically ignored the comment, changed the subject, or indicated that the issue would be addressed in a different training session. There was only one occasion, where *Change Agent 1* said, "excuse me sir" to a manager. This was the only instance where resistance was directly acknowledged.

What Figure 4 provides in addition to the previous Figure, is the remaining steps in the resistance-change feedback loop. In this depiction, after the immediate reaction of the *Change Agents* (typically silence or re-direction), the change agents had the opportunity to exert their own authority in-between training sessions by altering their presentation of FREE. The *Change Agents* did not have the organizational status and authority within the context of these meetings (as chapter 5 described) to outright challenge these individuals who expressed resistance. The *Change Agents* did, however, remain in control of FREE and the FREE process, as well as the FREE meeting agenda. In these instances, the *Change Agents* had the authority to make changes to FREE (as the above examples describe). These changes were a way of indirectly acknowledging

resistance; it did not respond to it head-on, but it dealt with issues and concerns potentially before they arose in the future.

Changes to the FREE implementation passed through a type of trial-and-error process as the *Change Agents* tested new activities, vocabularies, jokes, and even tried the removal of some activities that had been instituted. Once a new activity or one that had been removed proved to reduce resistance, it then became an official part of the FREE implementation process. The *Change Agents*'s changes were made as responses to resistance, with the aim of reducing or eliminating that resistance in future sessions.

Figure 4 describes the feedback loop where changes to FREE, once proven successful, became a legitimate part of the implementation, and the process began again. In this sense, these new activities were then open to resistance from other groups. After activities had been tried, as long as they seemed to dissipate or reduce resistance to previously attempted activities, the new activities were accepted and retained (as an almost evolutionary process). This did not mean, however, that these activities would not spark resistance in the future. The FREE implementation process was under constant scrutiny and redirection by the change agents, being adapted as needed to fit the demands and concerns of the FREE training population.

Examining the process of resistance and change over time, this pattern is demonstrated in many of the subtle changes to FREE that involved altering language to incorporate jokes, refine terminology, and add activities, as well as the more major changes to the information, types of sessions, and culture discussions. In addition to these subtle changes that were an effort to streamline the process and keep information new, fresh, interesting, and persuasive, larger changes and adaptations to the

implementation process were also evident. These larger changes dealt more with the style of the presentation and the major activities and discussions that comprised the sessions.

Beginning with our first observation (Table 1), the first instance of resistance occurred in P2 and again in P6. P6 is also the first session where a documented change occurs. After this, there is an alternating pattern in resistance and change that jumps back and forth from column to column. After multiple events of resistance there is change. Rarely do change and resistance emerge in the same session. This research argues that patterns in changes are linked to patterns of resistance.

For instance, there is a little resistance and a little change at the beginning of our study, but then the first real block of changes comes during P19-P-25. These changes were primarily to the information presented, including new statistics and the “Technology Tips & Tricks” sheet. At this point, the Restructure is still the same and the video is still being used. P25 is the first session where we see a number of changes. In this session, *Change Agent 1* tells the entire team:

...this WR session will be different since there is a lot of tension from [this team’s] leadership.

In this session, *Change Agent 1* then spent more time discussing some of the topics from the previous (Language) session just to recap and make sure that everyone on the team had an understanding of what Language was and how to recognize it. Because there was a lot of emphasis on review and clarity, and perhaps because of the “tension” from this team, this is also the first group where the commitments and video is skipped.

Week following these sessions includes minimal resistance and minimal change. We observed another difficult session where the videos and commitments are skipped at the end of a Restructure. We also observed the *Change Agents* add the first panel of FREE experts to a Initiation session. Here, we see more changes in how the *Change Agents* ask the next groups to make commitments to FREE. This team went through several more FREE sessions in which these managers continued to resist the change. In the following sessions, whether or not the change agents conduct this activity seems to depend on how cooperative the group is. They tended to not ask resistant groups and ask groups that viewed FREE in a more positive light. In this case, a few bad apples ruined the whole pie. If a discussion proved tenuous, the *Change Agents* changed it for the next group. As mentioned in Chapter 2, not everyone resisted change. In fact, most participants were happy to see the initiative implemented in their teams. It was the resisters, scattered throughout the training, who compelled the *Change Agents* to make these changes.

The next plot of resistance to FREE (P36-P43) begins with the influential sessions where one manager twirls in his chair, yawns, and distracts his group and another manager walks out of the meeting. These two managers appear in sessions following this and are often distracting, disrespectful and walk out of the meeting. It is after this that we observed the panel prep session (described above) where *Change Agent 1* coached the panel to “put out ‘consistent message’ to keep the change moving” and then refers to resistant managers as “assholes.”

Whether or not this change seemed to assuage managers’ concerns, a difficult team was also moving through FREE just after this. Within sessions P46-P57, we

observed 10 sessions that contained at least one instance of resistance. In the middle of this block (P52), the *Change Agents* organized and held their first Language Session just for managers, later instituting a Restructure, as well as a Discussion Session and other, additional meetings just for managers. At the end of this ten-block chunk of sessions with resistance (P58), the *Change Agents* hold their first Check-In Session. The purpose of this session was to catch-up with teams and see how they are doing while implementing FREE. This serves as a touch-based and Q&A opportunity for both of the *Change Agents*, as well as the team.

The next block of resistance occurred in P63-75, where there was almost solid resistance in each session we observed. This emerged after several managers were disrespectful to the *Change Agents*, one manager told *Change Agent 2* that she was “not living the values of the company,” and managers that would not acknowledge the negatives associated with the current work culture. This is also where jokes and funny terms about Language emerged (although evident throughout, heavily during the P60’s – P73). The new language seemed to be attempts at jokes and levity, and also something that could be used as a demonstration of other teams buy-in (by stating Manager X or Employee Y from XXX team came up with this new term). At the end of this block of resistance, we also observed the first Teach-In Session, which was another leader-only session aimed at ascertaining management buy-in.

Their discussion of the organizational culture was something that also changed throughout, but especially after managers were critical of the *Change Agents*’s framing of their current work environment. Recall the quotes from above:

Change Agent 2 comments that she will set up the discussion of the culture in the same way in this group (that it isn't bad, just could use some improvement. (P63 and 64).

Change Agent 2 told me that they've run into some trouble with groups that think the current culture is mostly great (i.e: any meeting that [manager's name] has been in). She and *Change Agent 1* decided that they needed to frame that discussion a little differently in order to satisfy those that don't see the culture as "bad." (P67).

P77-P83 contained quite a bit of resistance, and, in the middle of this block was the conversation between *Change Agent 1*, *Change Agent 2*, *PI 1*, and *PI 2* where the change agents described a man in a high-ranking leadership position who made fun of FREE at a company-wide meeting. It was after this, P84, that the *Change Agents* held a meeting with a team and their HR generalists, created the "No Language" buttons, and again, used the video off and on in the Restructure.

Following this, we observed blocks of resistance in P87-P91, P96-P98, P101-P104, and then again at P113. This begins a whole bunch of changes to FREE. We observed another manager check-in with HR (P97), asking how teams feel about the guideposts and adding Dilbert Cartoons (P98), shifting the Restructure to the Group Implement (P105), the first Discussion Session for only managers, a FREE session for only administrative assistants, and then in P113, the emergence of the scripted language and session discussions. Slowly, these changes were building toward a more polished, consistent, version of FREE.

But perhaps the biggest changes came toward the end of our observations. Beginning with the session 113 (above), where the scripts were first evident and the *Change Agents* clarified their message, FREE began to change at a more rapid pace. In

sessions P115-123, we see multiple changes per session and more major changes to FREE. P115 holds the new *FREE* language, P116 is an Assessment where the survey is different and the statistics the *Change Agents* put in front of managers are new. We see more branding, new guideposts, new stats on work and family, the No-Language buttons are handed out, and, most importantly, the new culture discussions emerge.

The final leg of sessions that we observed, P124-P144, saw minimal resistance as compared to the middle section of our observations, and little more change to FREE. In fact, sessions P135-P141 contain no resistance and no change. By P131, the new Group Implement had fully taken over and the remaining activities from the Restructure (calendar game, video at the end) had been replaced by the Feud Game and a new video at the start of the session. The last bit of change that we observed was in Session P144 and P145 where the *Change Agents* again introduced more branding, more polished PowerPoint presentations, more videos, and other visuals.

Resistance-Change Summary

This research proposes that these changes and adaptations to FREE came out of this resistance from managers, that resistance prompted the change agents to refine their presentation of information, activities, and discussions throughout the FREE implementation. In previous chapters, I have stated that the *Change Agents* were lower-status workers. They were also female employees working in a highly feminized area of the organization (HR). Thus, their status within the context of these meetings did not permit them to openly challenge managers of a higher status and tenure, especially male managers (Connell 2005). What the *Change Agents* could control was FREE and the

presentation of FREE to managers and employees. I theorize that changes to the implementation process, whether it was subtle jokes in the sessions, adding sessions, or changing the name of the initiative to *FREE*, occurred because of expressions of resistance to the change initiative. If the change is working well and managers are happy with it, then why adapt, alter, or refine the training? This is what occurred toward the end of our observation period. In the last sessions where there was no resistance, there were also no more (subtle or dramatic) changes to FREE.

Piderit (2000) argues that resistance to change is not *really* resistance; it is ambivalence. This research would disagree with that notion. What was presented in these sessions was real resistance. What she would have classified as ambivalence did not make the cut according to the definition of resistance used in this research. These findings concur with the notion that, whether it is truly resistance to change, in this case it appeared to be beneficial to the process overall.

As Chapter 2 established, findings from other FREE studies described positive outcomes for employees and managers in terms of work, health and health behaviors, and work-life interface. *Streamline* (still working with FREE to this day) considers the initiative an overall success, as does the *Change Agents*. So, it worked. Piderit (2000) argues that ambivalence produces constructive dialogue and prompts situations where concerns regarding the change are worked through and resolved. This research, given the overall success of the FREE initiative, would agree. The resistance evident in these sessions prompted the change agents to reconsider how they were presenting the change and to refine and streamline definitions, activities that exemplified working situations, the

number of sessions they needed overall, the language they used to describe the change, and a host of other aspects of their training implementation.

The role of innovation is key here as well. Described in previous chapters, FREE was an innovation. FREE was far more than an organizational change, it was completely new and not tried and tested. This aspect required managers to simply trust the *Change Agents* (again an issue due to their lower-status in the organization). This research argues that innovation played a central role in this resistance-change loop. Perhaps if the company was simply switching to a new management style, resistance would not have emerged in this fashion. Perhaps then the *Change Agents*'s own status and legitimacy may not have been called into question in these sessions. This research argues that innovation is important in this context for that very reason. The innovation aspect is what called into question the *Change Agents*'s personal identity. Since there was no proof that FREE would work, coupled with the fact that it was designed by two lower-status women from HR, given this social context, it is not surprising that managers resisted the change. In the end (or the end of our study period) resistance was futile in the sense that it did not completely impede the implementation of FREE at *Streamline*. Resistance was, however, successful in bringing up concerns and issues, so much so that the change agents readdressed their strategies and tactics. Although resistance did not stop the change, it did influence the change in that it promoted changes to the implementation. Not only was FREE beginning to cause changes in work teams and their habits (described in Chapter 2) as these groups moved through the training sessions, but the training sessions began to evolve, not adapting or molding the overarching goals of the FREE initiative itself, but the way that it was presented to participants and audiences within the company.

In addition to these predicted and expected changes in work habits and behaviors, we noticed an additional, unanticipated type of change also begin to emerge with the FREE roll out. The training sessions began to evolve, not adapting or molding the overarching goals of the FREE initiative itself, but the way that it was presented to participants and audiences within the company. It was evident that implementation process was being refined. The *Change Agents* were beginning to strategically alter elements of their training. While examining these trends in events of resistance and changes to FREE during the analysis, a clear link emerged between what was resisted and what, with regard to FREE, was adapted. Consequently, the responses to resistance, evident in the concessions and adaptations that the *Change Agents* subsequently made, eventually impelled the evolution of FREE.

Resistance to the FREE implementation prompted changes and adaptations in the FREE implementation process. The change agents did not have the power, organizational status, or authority to respond to resistance from managers directly, so they responded through the aspect that they did have control over, the FREE training (Fiol et al. 2001; Walsh et al. 1981). Overall, Table 1 demonstrates how blocks of resistance were followed by blocks of change to FREE. Larger blocks of resistance lead to subsequently larger blocks of changes. Changes that appeared to be a success were instituted in the training and remained there for future groups. Changes or existing activities that seemed to foster more resistance were removed. Toward the end of our observations, as the resistance slowed down, so did the changes to the FREE implementation.

This chapter argues 1) FREE adapted and changed over time because of resistance to the initiative, 2) this response to resistance (changing the change) occurred because the *Change Agents* lacked the power, status, and authority to challenge the resistance in a more formal capacity, and 3) that resistance to innovation is critical to this situation because it speaks to the unknown, and not previously established, potential consequences and outcomes of such a dramatic change in working and work behaviors.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion: Summary of Resistance

The FREE initiative was based on a dialectical model of organizational change, pitting the existing organizational culture and work practices against an ideal model that FREE proposed to move the company toward. This use of the dialectical model, however, provided the backdrop for resistance. The *Change Agents* received far more than they bargained for with respect to the resistance that emerged during the FREE implementation. Recall the pertinent research questions: 1) How does resistance to change impact the future actions of change agents and the innovation implementation process? 2) What underlying motivations and social mechanisms might contribute to or drive resistance (such as power, culture, and structure)? Finally, 3) Is resistance to *innovation* something distinct and unique from resistance to change? How can scholars improve understanding of the innovation process through the examination of internal resistance to innovation?

This dissertation has described how resistance to change, in the case of FREE, was evident at the macro, meso, and micro levels of abstraction. This work also suggests that resistance may be potentially motivated by the challenge to individual identity construction both in and out of the organization. How individual workers define their sense of self is largely impacted by how they see themselves as workers and providers (Albert, Ashforth, and Dutton 2000; Brewer and Gardner 1996). Changing work at *Streamline* changed managers' (and employees') sense of self as a worker.

This research also emphasizes the role that innovation plays in this case of resistance, in a manner that is distinct from resistance to change. In this context, the fact

that this organizational change implementation involved an administrative innovation only strengthened the resistance to the change and to the individual change agents. The questionable legitimacy and authority of the change agents left a space for critique and discussion. This dissertation posits that organizational change and innovation are processes that are responsive to resistance. The change implementation incorporated dramatically different activities, language, and discussions by the end of our study period.

Although I would classify resistance in this case as resistance, and not ambivalence, as Piderit (2000) would, this research suggests that it still propels the change. In this case of individual resistance, not mobilized as a group or coalition to prohibit the implementation of the change, resistance became beneficial in the refinement and clarification of the change. Perhaps this would have led to a different outcome. If resisters were able to convene formally, perhaps they would have had more traction in stalling FREE or stopping it altogether. Resistance to innovation, in this case, also contributed positively to the innovation implementation.

Essentially, I argue that 1) individual identity and the social construction of identity serve as potential motivators for resistance to change at macro, meso, and micro levels of abstraction, 2) that the dialectic nature of the FREE implementation fostered and promoted resistance to the change, 3) that resistance to change impacts the overall implementation of the change moving forward, and finally, 4) that this is a case of resisting innovation and that this carries with it a different set of resistance factors and motivations.

The Dialectic Model and Resistance to Change

Recall from the FREE description and Figure 1, that the change agents had intentionally constructed a macro dialectic, pitting FREE against the current institution of work and the ideal worker norm. The resistance and conflict that managers exhibited in these sessions pinpointed a challenge to existing beliefs about how *work* should be conceptualized (macro), changing the culture and work routines within the *organization* (meso), as well as confronting *individuals'* legitimacy and status (micro). I propose that resistance was motivated by and focused on reactions to change processes and challenges at these three levels (macro, meso, and micro). Figure 2 demonstrated how the challenges at each level generated resistance to abstract ideas, changes the actual changes in work process, and resistance to individuals based on status. All three levels point down to the construction of the self and individual identity.

Motivations for resistance to FREE were based in resistance to one of the three ideological challenges at different levels of abstraction. Data suggest, and I theorize here, that managers resisted at these three levels because the proposed changes also required them to change part of their construction of the self and what it means to be a worker. The ideal worker norm and their roles within the organization (including power and status as managers) were about to change with FREE. I propose that managers resisted FREE because it meant making these changes to the construction and understanding of their identity. In this case, resisting change is not necessarily about resisting change, but resisting the changes to the self.

This work proposes that resisting organizational change has important seeds within the development and the presentation of the self in an organizational context.

Chapter 5 described how resistance to the FREE change implementation was rooted in resistance to each of the three levels. The important take-away from this is that this research has demonstrated a link between resistance to change and identity theory. Thus, these sessions became a forum for some managers to demonstrate their power and enact their authority over the change agents. Again, this point illustrates that managers resisted potentially because of the threats to their identity as workers and managers, but that their organizational status, power, and legitimacy was what allowed them to openly express their resistance.

Resistance at the Macro Level

More specifically, resistance at the macro level was motivated by the challenges that the initiative posed to the social construction of work in the corporate realm and to the ideological changes that would follow. The first was the introduction of the macro level conceptualization of work on a grand scale. FREE required participants to consider a different mode of work, a different way of working, which challenged the institutionalized ideal worker norm. At a basic level, this also challenged participants to reconsider their conceptualization of themselves as individuals and as workers within the organization. This research proposes that managers, in particular, were susceptible to conflicts between the large-scale ideas behind FREE and their construction of the self as a worker and manager. I theorize in Chapter 5 that managers resisted these reconceptualizations of the nature of work because of the challenges it posed to their identity (see Brewer and Gardner 1996; Brickson and Brewer 2001). This was

demonstrated through descriptions of managers' resistance in the training implementation sessions.

Resistance at the Meso (Operational) Level

Concurrently, FREE suggested a re-organization of work on a day-to-day basis. Resistance at the meso (or operational) level was classified by events that dealt with the organization and the more practical changes that would occur within everyday work and interactions. At this *operational* level (meaning the actual, work-related changes with FREE), resistance emerged more as concerns about changing the hard aspects of everyday work rather than the bigger-picture ideas about what constitutes work. Managers also resisted these challenges that FREE posed to how and where work was done. Allowing remote work, promoting varied start and end times, and changes in core work hours were some of the few new practices associated with FREE. Again, based on previous literature that establishes how individuals define their sense of self in terms of work and the work organization (Albert, et al. 2000; Brewer and Gardner 1996; Brickson 2005; Brickson and Brewer 2001; Brewer and Gardner 1996; Glynn 2000; Golden-Biddle and Rao 1997), this research proposes that managers resisted making these changes because of the inherent changes to their own demonstration of the self as workers and managers.

Resistance at the Micro Level

Resistance at the micro level took the form of conflict in inter-personal interaction that did not necessarily challenge the larger ideas about FREE, but was more focused on

the individuals within the training session—the change agents specifically. I propose that forms of resistance and patterns of expression that were classified as this level of resistance were opposition to the change, but in the context of the abilities and qualifications of the change agents administering the training. At this individual level, managers resisted more than the concepts and tenets behind the FREE initiative; they resisted the change agents. Resistance at the micro level was exhibited through direct challenges to the *Change Agents*'s training, disrespectful comments, and other uncooperative and counter-productive behaviors. The lack of formal authority in smaller group sessions such as these training sessions forces participants to often resort to personal power and status (Fiol et al. 2001). Within the sessions, managers had a higher authority based on their organizational status, therefore, the *Change Agents* had no ground on which to directly challenge managers that spoke out. The lack of formal authority in smaller group sessions such as these training sessions forces participants to often resort to personal power and status (Fiol et al. 2001). The *Change Agents* were the authority on FREE, but not the highest structural authority present in the room, therefore they could not directly challenge managers in the sessions (Valley and Thompson 1998; Walsh et al. 1981).

Resistance to Innovation

At all levels, but especially so at the micro resistance level, it becomes important to consider that FREE is truly innovative. No other flexible work initiative had called for the dramatic shifts in thinking and culture; no other flexible work initiative was available to everyone and shifted control from the manager to the employee (see Chermack et al.

n.d). Again, the legitimacy, know-how, educational attainment, status within the organization, and gender of the change agents became a factor in resisting the implementation of FREE.

Resistance to innovation is distinct because the simple fact that the new process implementation has not been tried and tested in previous cases fosters uncertainty, both in terms of outcomes and legitimacy (see the definition of innovation from Chapter 4). Innovation does not provide a model or path of success from previous trials. Similarly, the inherent lack of “proof” associated with the potential success of the FREE initiative requires a certain trust in the change proponents or change agents. The implementation of FREE required managers to trust the *Change Agents* in their efforts to improve the work culture and the company’s bottom line. In this sense, their legitimacy as individual workers (embodying their social traits and statuses) was up for review in a public forum. This lack of direct engagement in the sessions is no doubt due to their ambiguous role in the status hierarchy within the organization and an uncertainty in asserting power or control due to this lack of structural clarity (Knights and Willmott 1989). Individual managers questioned the *Change Agent*’s power, authority, and individual social statuses as capable decision-makers through resistance to change at the micro level.

The Organizational Change/Innovation Adaptations Over Time

As Walsh et al. (1981) describe, one thing that the *Change Agents* did have control over and could influence was the content of the meeting agenda. It was completely within their power to alter the FREE training as they saw fit. This dissertation also proposed that the change implementation adapted to resistance over time. In this

context, resistance prompted adjustments to the training and implementation of the change. Many of the changes to the FREE training involved the language of the presentation, activities that demonstrated the principals of the initiative, and discussions about changing the culture. I theorized that these changes to the implementation process, whether they emerged as subtle jokes in the sessions, new sessions and activities, or changes in language such as changing the name of the initiative to *FREE*, occurred as a result of expressions of resistance to the change initiative (see also Gallobb and Levine 1967; Hodson 1995; Ribordy et al. 2010). The resistance evident in these sessions prompted the change agents to reconsider how they were presenting the change and to refine and streamline their training implementation. While examining these trends in events of resistance and changes to FREE during the analysis, a clear link emerged between what was resisted and what, with regard to FREE, was adapted. Consequently, the responses to resistance, evident in the concessions and adaptations that the *Change Agents* subsequently made, eventually impelled the evolution of FREE.

FREE was a success. Resisters, however much they impacted the implementation process, did not stop FREE. This occurred for two reasons. First, they did not mobilize into collective and organized resistance. Second, FREE was a pull not a push factor. In order for departments to begin the FREE migration, the SVP of the department was required to ask for FREE in the division. In this case, it would have been difficult for VPs and directors to essentially challenge the directive of their senior leaders, highlighting both the level of their power within the sessions, but their limits outside of these interactions (Fiol et al. 2001; Hallett 2003; Knights and Willmott 1989). Exhibiting

resistance in front of the *Change Agents*, making them feel uncomfortable and challenging their authority, was within the bounds of their power as managers.

Contributions to the Literature

Based on these findings, this dissertation makes several important contributions to the fields of sociology, social psychology, and organization theory. Suggesting that resistance to change is rooted in identity theory and social-psychology is an advancement in organizational change theory. Past research on organizational change and resistance that focuses on reactions and outcomes (for example: Amburgey and Rao 1996; Barnett and Carroll 1995; Hage 1999; Hannan and Freeman 1984; Tolbert and Zucker 1983) glosses over this more detailed understanding of catalysts and potential motivators behind resistance, as well as the influential properties that it may entail. This existing research takes for granted many of the possible antecedents of resistance, suggesting that it is a less-dynamic process than this dissertation asserts. This dissertation proposed that there is much more to resistance to change, outside of individual employees' and managers' desire to maintain the status quo. Incorporating theories of identity construction at the macro level, individual identities as workers at the meso level, and conflicts between identities at the micro level, this research posits that resistance to change, and to innovation, is a far-more complex process than previously believed. This is an important step in understanding resistance as it calls for further theoretical development and empirically-derived knowledge. If resistance to change is linked to identity construction,

as this research theorizes, then there is further potential for understanding, addressing, and reducing resistance in organization theory.

In addition to this contribution of potential motivating factors, this work also posits that resistance to an innovation complicates the process of resistance to change by adding another level of density. As discussed, the concept of innovation, which implies no tried and tested path to success, required managers to simply trust the *Change Agents* and their abilities as workers. This trust requirement prompted individual resistance and conflicts between managers and the change agents, adding to resistance at the individual level.

This work also suggests that organizational change and innovation are susceptible to resistance, and that these processes often change themselves, adapting to the efforts of the resisters. Much like Piderit's (2000) work on resistance to change and ambivalence, this research corroborates the idea that resistance can actually be beneficial. In the FREE case, resistance pushed the change agents to clarify and mold their change implementation process in a more succinct and direct manner. Although one could argue that this research suggests the change implementation was weak in that it was impacted by resistance, this research also suggests that resistance promotes a more solid implementation. FREE was deemed a success, by the organization and by independent research. In the case of resistance to FREE, the adaptations of the change only made FREE clearer and stronger in the long run. But by the end of our study, there was little resistance and few changes to the FREE implementation. I theorize that resistance to FREE prompted a more successful implementation in the long-term.

These implications are important for both theory and practice. Although the goal of this dissertation is to provide an empirical study that informs the literature and demonstrates scholarly expertise, I hope that a practical application derives from this research. It is important for practitioners to be familiar with change processes and resistance to change and I hope that this research will also inform future change agents and help them to reflect on their change processes. In light of this discussion of potential motivating factors for resistance, I suspect that this research provides insightful information to practitioners planning to implement organizational change.

Continuing to examine the impacts and antecedents of resistance to change (and to innovation) will provide important research on the social theory of organizations. Limited by size and lack of generalizability, this dissertation suggests avenues for further research. Scholars should continue to probe at what motivates resistance in other contexts and capacities outside of this specific case study example. Comparing factors like organizational size, industry, and type of change will be necessary to establish trends in the resistance-change loop. Future research should also consider other outcomes of resistance such as stalling or destroying the change implementation, considering the idea that blocking this change appeared to be unsuccessful without mobilization. The change was a success in this case, but there may be other contexts where the resistance-change loop does not become a success and the initiative fails. The scholarly community needs to understand these complex social processes in context in order to understand why managers and employees resist beyond the current, surface explanations.

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Appendix A: Table 1

Resistance and Change Over Time

P- Doc	Session	Type I Resistance	Type II Change
1	04-07-05 initiation		"Baseline"
2	04-11-05 language	██████████	
3	04-14-05 language		
4	04-15-05 language		
5	04-15-05 language		
6	14-29-05 leadership panel	████████████████████	
7	05-05-05 language		
8	05-06-05 restructure		██████████
9	05-09-05 language		
10	05-13-05 restructure	██████████	
11	05-16-05 restructure		
12	05-16-05 initiation		
13	05-15-05 restructure		██████████
14	05-23-05 language	██████████	
15	05-24-05 language		
16	05-25-05 language		
17	05-25-05 language		
18	05-26-05 restructure		
19	05-31-05 language		██████████
20	06-01-05 language		
21	06-01-05 restructure		██████████
22	06-01-05 restructure		██████████
23	06-02-05 restructure		
24	06-06-05 language & restructure combined		
25	06-06-05 restructure		██████████
26	06-07-05 restructure	██████████	██████████
27	06-07-05 initiation		██████████
28	06-07-05 restructure		
29	06-09-05 restructure		██████████
30	06-13-05 manager initiation	██████████	
31	06-13-05 restructure		██████████
32	06-14-05 restructure		██████████
33	06-14-05 restructure		██████████
34	06-15-05 language		
35	06-15-05 restructure		
36	06-20-05 leadership panel	██████████	
37	06-22-05 restructure		
38	06-22-05 restructure	████████████████████	██████████
39	06-24-05 restructure	██████████	██████████
40	06-29-05 restructure	██████████	

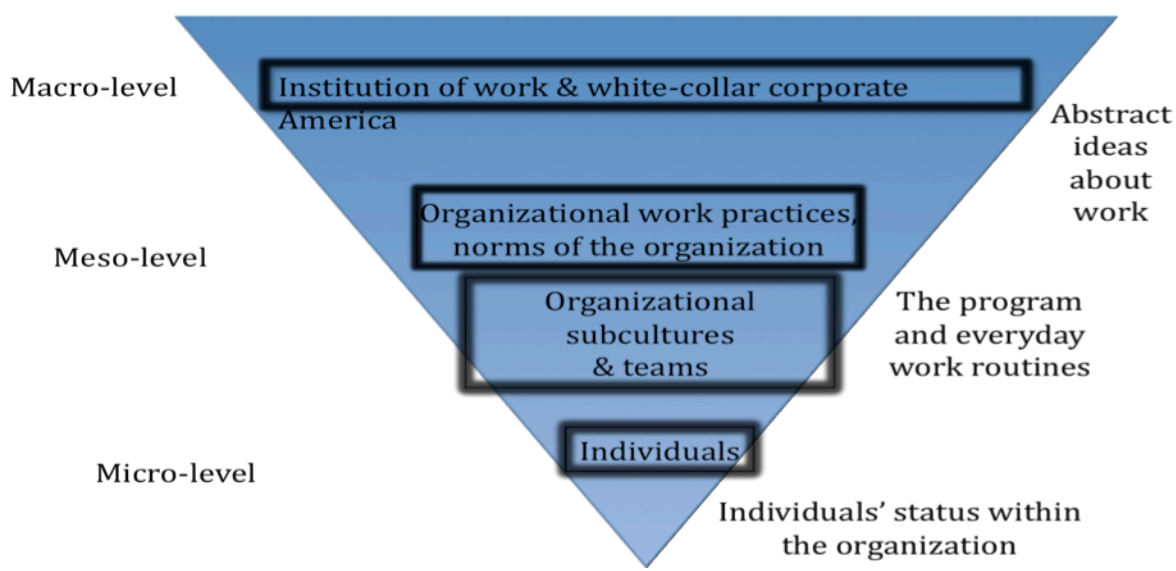
41	06-29-05 restructure		
42	06-30-05 leadership meeting	██████████	
43	07-11-05 assessment		██████████
44	07-14-05 panel prep meeting		██████████
45	07-19-05 manager initiation		
46	07-21-05 language	██████████	
47	07-20-05 initiation	██████████	
48	07-20-05 assessment		██████████
49	07-20-05 language	██████████	
50	07-12-05 manager initiation		██████████
51	07-21-05 managers meeting	██████████	██████████
52	07-21-05 leadership language	██████████	
53	07-21-05 directors meeting		
54	07-25-05 next steps meeting	██████████	
55	07-31-05 initiation	██████████	
56	08-01-05 initiation		
57	08-01-05 leadership restructure	██████████	
58	08-02-05 check-in		
59	08-02-05 check-in		
60	08-02-05 language	██████████	
61	08-03-05 restructure		██████████
62	08-03-05 language		██████████
63	08-09-05 language	██████████	
64	08-09-05 language	██████████	
65	08-09-05 manager initiation		██████████
66	08-09-05 manager initiation		██████████
67	08-15-05 manager initiation		██████████
68	08-17-05 language	██████████	
69	08-17-05 language	██████████	
70	08-17-05 language		██████████
71	08-19-05 language	██████████	
72	08-24-05 language	██████████	██████████
73	08-25-05 language		██████████
74	08-25-05 check-in		
75	08-26-05 language	██████████	
76	09-08-05 teach -in		██████████
77	09-09-05 restructure	██████████	
78	09-09-05 restructure		██████████
79	09-14-05 interview with the <i>Change Agents</i> transcription	██████████	██████████
80	09-26-05 manager initiation	██████████	
81	09-26-05 language		
82	09-28-05 discussion session		
83	09-29-05 language	██████████	
84	09-29-05 meeting with the <i>Change Agents</i>		██████████
85	10-03-05 initiation		
86	10-04-05 check-in		
87	10-06-05 restructure		██████████

88	10-06-05 check-in	
89	10-19-05 manager initiation	
90	10-19-05 check-in	
91	10-19-05 education	
92	11-07-05 language	
93	11-09-05 assessment	
94	11-14-05 assessment	
95	11-14-05 discussion session	
96	11-14-05 manager initiation	
97	11-14-05 check-in with HR	
98	11-21-05 manager initiation	
99	12-01-05 discussion session	
100	12-01-05 discussion session	
101	12-01-05 training discussion session	
102	12-20-05 group implement	
103	12-28-05 FREE panel	
104	01-03-06 manager initiation	
105	01-04-06 assessment	
106	01-04-06 discussion session	
107	01-23-06 manager initiation	
108	01-24-06 discussion session	
109	01-25-06 tech discussion session	
110	02-01-06 discussion session	
111	02-02-06 admin meeting	
112	02-10-06 leadership panel	
113	02-15-06 manager initiation	
114	02-16-06 discussion session	
115	02-21-06 initiation	
116	02-21-06 assessment	
117	02-27-06 language	
118	03-09-06 discussion session	
119	03-15-06 language	
120	03-20-06 initiation	
121	03-20-06 panel	
122	03-27-06 language	
123	03-28-06 language	
124	04-07-06 manager initiation	
125	04-14-06 FREE 'pitch' meeting	
126	04-17-06 language	
127	04-17-06 language	
128	04-17-06 language	
129	04-21-06 language	
130	05-02-06 group implement	
131	05-03-06 group implement	
132	05-04-06 group implement	
133	05-05-06 group implement	
134	05-08-06 group implement	
135	05-09-06 FREE Discussion session "training" panel	

136	05-15-06 group implement		
137	05-16-06 group implement		
138	05-18-06 group implement		
139	05-31-06 manager initiation		
140	06-26-06 discussion session		
141	06-26-06 discussion session		
142	08-08-06 manager initiation		
143	09-20-06 initiation		
144	10-19-16 discussion session		
	total	48	51

Appendix B: Figure 1

Figure 1: Conceptual Model: Operation of Dialectic Processes at 3 Levels



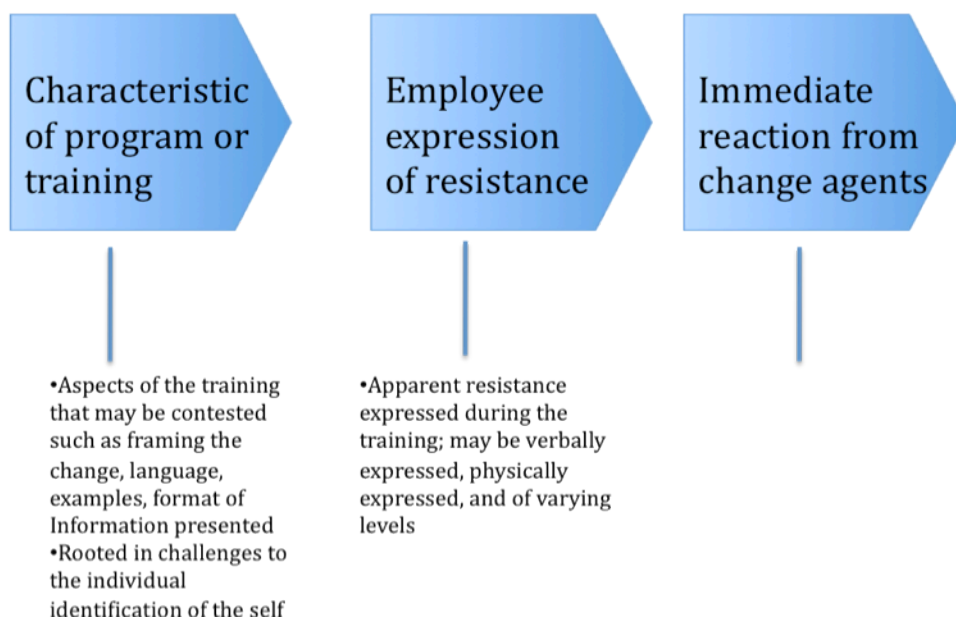
Appendix C: Figure 2

Figure 2: Operation of Dialectic Processes and Resistance to Change



Appendix D: Figure 3

Figure 3: Resistance-Response Process



Appendix E: Figure 4

Figure 4: Implementation Adaptation Process

