The Layers of Resistance –
The Buy-In Process According to TOC
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Introduction

Sitting in a crowded airport lounge not long ago, I overheard a discussion between two men regarding a proposed change in their organization. The first man was making a real effort to convince his colleague to go along with the change. The colleague was clearly not thrilled about the idea, and began raising objection after objection. As soon as the first man addressed those concerns, his colleague was either ready with a new objection or, worse, insisted on rehashing a problem the two had already discussed. As the men grew more and more irritated with one another, all I could think of was how I wished these guys were familiar with the Layers of Resistance—*that* might have given them a chance to get somewhere instead of going around in circles.

When we recognize that a change should be made, we often realize that we cannot pull it off without someone else's permission and/or collaboration. Thinking about bringing another party on board tends to make us somewhat apprehensive. Not only because of the time and effort it is going to take, but mostly because we can't be sure that these efforts will pay off; getting buy-in is not a trivial task. So, we prepare our arguments (or don't), take a deep breath, and tell the other party all about our fantastic idea.

Sometimes it works and they get excited, and sometimes it doesn't and they leave less than enthused. Resistance comes in many forms: We might encounter a flat-out NO, or get caught in the cycle of objection and reassurance like those folks at the airport. Even a repetitive "let me think about it" can be a type of resistance, and there are many more. The result is still the same: We do not yet have the approval or collaboration we need in order to move on.

Our natural reaction on such occasions is to get all worked up and blame the other party for being indifferent or stubborn or even stupid (Goldratt, 2009). After all, they are the ones who failed (miserably, we might like to tell ourselves) to see the need for our change. The literature on the subject also focuses on the other parties' reasons for resisting change, stating causes such as personality traits (e.g., intolerance for ambiguity, need for control), inertia, promoting or protecting one's self-interest, and more. If we pause for a minute to think about what these causes mean, we can see that the literature has a lot in common with our natural reaction—both imply that the person who resists the change is the "bad guy" in the situation. TOC takes a very different stand in that matter. What TOC suggests is that instead of blaming the other party, the person proposing the change should be accountable for thoroughly planning and presenting the change.

First of all, let us assume that we are talking about a win-win change, one that benefits all parties involved. Too often we come up with the most creative justifications for demanding that others give up their needs so that we can get ours met. We are pushing for a win-lose change. If we expect to "win" at the expense of the other side, we are practically asking for resistance—and shouldn't be surprised when we get it. Win-lose solutions are hard to sell, and even if we have the power to enforce them, we cannot expect our partners to collaborate happily. In this chapter, we focus only on win-win changes.

At first glance, it seems that win-win changes should be easy to sell. After all, if everyone wins, why would anyone object? Win-win changes should practically sell themselves. In reality, however, this turns out to be false. People do object to win-win solutions, and often for very good reasons. For instance, they may not be clear on *how* they win, exactly (or, shall we say, we haven't outlined their benefits clearly enough), they may have concerns that we might have overlooked, they might believe this change will not "stick" and want to preserve their energy for more worthwhile efforts (as excited as we are about this change, have we really thought of how to integrate it fully?), and so on. Today's world presents people with abundant opportunities to make changes in all areas of life. In order to make sure that they look after their best interest and use their resources for efforts that will pay off, it stands to reason that people will approach change with various degrees of caution. If we would like to implement a change that requires their collaboration, then it is up to us to buy them in.

Some of us are excellent salespeople when it comes to getting people on board, and some of us are less "talented" in that area. We have all initiated and implemented successful changes in the past, but we have probably failed too—we have tried to get others to collaborate and we have gotten stuck. The question is, when we get stuck, is there something we can do about it? Is there a way for us to uncover the other party's concerns and address them properly? Or, if we anticipate difficulty in getting buy-in for a certain change, can we tackle it in advance? Can we systematically line up our arguments, so that we have a better chance of getting people to collaborate with us? The TOC "Layers of Resistance" may offer significant insights into these questions.

The Layers of Resistance to Change
The Layers of Resistance to change originate from the TOC basic questions of change (Goldratt, 1984).
1. What to Change? (What is the problem we are attempting to address?)
2. What to Change to? (What is our solution to this problem?)
3. How to Cause the Change? (How to implement the solution?)

Taken together, these three questions represent the buy-in effort in a nutshell. Yet each one of these three is a separate issue that must be addressed before we even attempt to get the other party to buy-in to our change initiative. The second and third questions

(agreeing on the solution and the implementation steps) may seem self-explanatory, but it is also vital to make sure that everyone understands and agrees on the problem. What sometimes happens is that in our haste to talk about the change (i.e., the solution), we neglect to verify that we agree on the problem—and if both parties have different problems in mind, the odds are rather slim that our solution addresses their problem. It is no wonder, then, that they fail to see the merit in our solution, and object to it.

The three questions of change thus highlight not only what should be covered in a buy-in effort, but also, and just as importantly, the inherent order in which this effort should be executed. There is no sense in talking about the solution before we agree on the problem, and no sense talking about the implementation steps before we agree on the solution. Hence, the three questions of change act as the basic Layers of Resistance to change that must be overcome or "peeled away," one after the other, in order to get a buy-in. We use the terms "layers" and "peeled away" since it's easy to picture the various challenges that must be overcome as peeling away layers of an onion until we get to the heart of the matter: the buy-in.
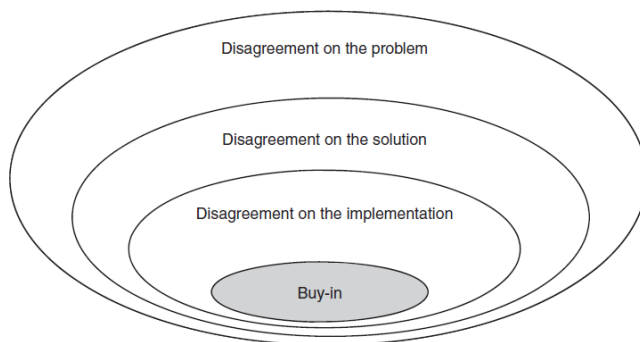

FIGURE 20-1 The basic Layers of Resistance based on the TOC questions of change.

Awareness of the three basic Layers of Resistance is sufficient to improve many discussions about change. It was clear that those guys at the airport were all over the place. The guy who objected kept bouncing from the reasons why it was impossible to implement the change (disagreement on the implementation), to questioning whether they should focus on that particular change (disagreement on the solution), to suggesting that they should solve another problem first (disagreement on the problem).

The initiator was doing his best to address each objection, but without any sense of progress; it was no wonder that those two were growing increasingly frustrated with each other and the entire discussion. The first thing they should have done was to pause and make sure that they agreed on what the problem was. Then, once they were on the same page, they could have moved forward to discuss the solution. If at that point they failed to reach an agreement, they would at least know where they stood and could restart from that point. In order to avoid wasting time and trying our own and our

partner's patience, we need to resist the urge to hop all over the place - we should identify as soon as possible the earliest "Layer" on which we disagree, and suggest to the other party that we concentrate on that issue before we move on to the next. Being aware of where we are in the discussion—identifying the Layer with which we have to deal—may also give us a better idea as to whether we are making progress or we are stuck. In tough situations where the changes may appear "radical" or the other party is exceedingly resistant, the buy-in process may still take some time. Instead of experiencing the uncomfortable feeling that we are going nowhere, the Layers may serve as a road map, indicating where we are, when it is appropriate to press forward in the discussion, and when we have to take a deep breath and stay put.

The three basic Layers of Resistance may be the essence of this model, yet they do not tell the whole story. Once we take a closer look at these Layers, we detect even finer Layers inside them. Since the term "Layers of Resistance" was first coined in My Saga to Improve Production (Goldratt, 1996a; 1996b, and later reprinted in 2003, 1–14), I have come across outlines of TOC Layers of Resistance that contained within them anywhere between three and nine Layers. The reason for this phenomenon is that in different types of changes, there may actually turn out to be different finer Layers of the basic three that should be dealt with separately. Also, the magnitude of the change has an effect, as large-scale changes tend to have more fine Layers than local, small changes.

Moreover, even with regard to a specific change it is difficult to predict how many and which Layers we will encounter. This is mainly because if we succeed in overcoming one Layer, the other party may overcome the next one independently. In order to develop further our intuition around identifying the Layers and successfully coping with them, it might be worthwhile to review the finer Layers one by one.

Disagreement on the Problem
Layer 0. There is no problem

When we approach the other party eager to discuss the win-win change we believe should be implemented, we sometimes receive responses such as, "What is wrong with what we have right now?" or, "There is no problem," or, "Everything is fine the way it is." These kinds of responses clearly indicate that there is no point discussing the problem (i.e., Layer 1) yet, as the other party does not yet acknowledge that there is a problem. We have to take a step back and deal first with Layer 0: Convincing the other party that something is wrong with the current state of affairs.

In an illustration that has been used in the TOC community for years when discussing the Layers of Resistance (Fig. 20-2), we approach Wary Will and tell him, "You have got to make the effort to climb that cliff (read: Implement the change) because there is an alligator right behind you!" Wary Will answers, "What are you talking about? I don't see any alligator."
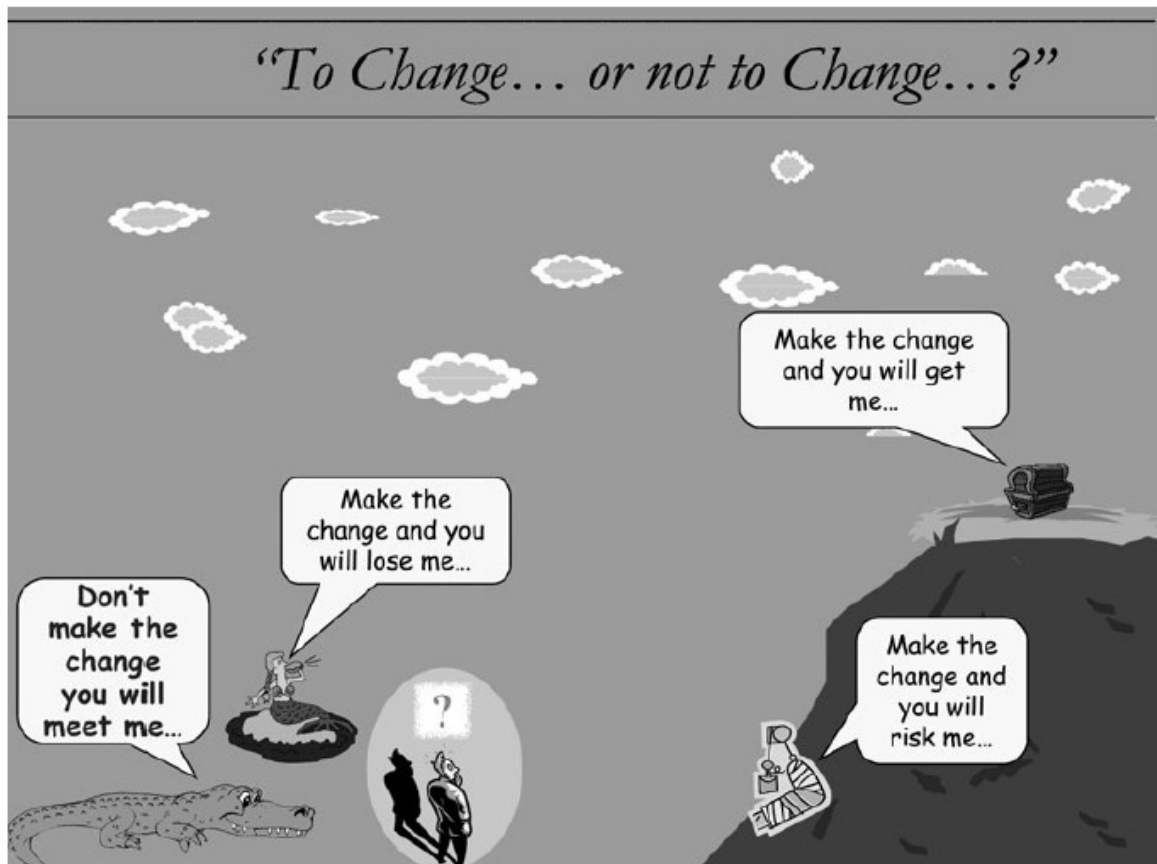
Figure 20-2 Weary Will's dilemma: To change or not to change.

The only way to move past this Layer is to listen very carefully to what the other party is saying—in other words, to understand what is truly behind their claim. Wary Will may claim there is no problem because the approaching alligator is still too far away for him to notice it, or he can claim that "there is no problem" because he believes that the approaching alligator is friendly and won't bite. Because these are two different cases, we will have to use very different arguments to convince Will that there is a problem. People may be stuck in Layer 0 for various reasons. Sometimes it is because they fail to see that there is something wrong in the current situation. Sometimes it's the opposite: They may have been well aware of the undesirable effects and fought very hard to get rid of them, but have failed so miserably that as far as they are concerned these negative phenomena must be accepted as part of reality. They might even have become so used to living with these negative phenomena that they no longer see them as negative (Goldratt, 2009, 19).

Blockage at this layer may even be inherited from a predecessor who fought and failed, so the person to whom we are talking may not be aware that things can be different. It

is no wonder, then, that they don't think the change we are presenting to them should be a priority.

How do we move beyond this Layer? The best way is to take the time to understand fully where the other side is coming from. We should let the other party talk and assist them in uncovering their assumptions until we identify their false assumption with regard to the situation. The next step is proving to them that their assumptions are not in fact valid and a problem does exist. Most of the time it only takes a few minutes for the other party to realize that they were operating under a misperception and we can move on. On other occasions, peeling away Layer 0 may take longer. In extreme cases, we might even need to hold a series of discussions in which we gradually bring the other party around to our view of the situation.

For those of us who tend to run out of patience, it may be best to muse upon the alternative for a moment: If we become frustrated, lose our temper, and decide to skip this step, what are the chances of the other person willingly collaborating with us? What are our chances of success without their support?

Sometimes it is wise to prepare some "ammo" going into a discussion with the other party, especially if the buy-in effort takes place as a formal presentation to a group. One approach that might help is to remind the other party of the goal they are trying to achieve and examine whether this goal is fully met with their current mode of operation. If we succeed in making the other party realize that their goals are not met to the extent they would like them to, it means there is a problem—we overcame Layer 0. In other cases, we might consider using another approach to peel back this layer: We need to remind the other party of some significant undesirable effects that are caused both by the problem we are attempting to solve, and by the problem from which the other party suffers. Then we need to convince the other party of two things: First, that these effects do indeed exist, and second, that they are harmful (and thus undesirable).

This discussion is not as painful to conduct as it may sound. That is, if we prepare for it. It is best to come up with four to seven undesirable effects that we must verbalize from the other party's point of view. Remember, mirroring the other party's terminology is key to getting buy-in. In order to demonstrate that these effects are part of our reality, we can use leading questions, numbers, or any other kind of "proof."

Most of the time this demonstration is sufficient because the undesirability of these effects speaks for itself. And if on occasion one or more of the undesirable effects are not intuitively perceived as negative, we can try to lead the other party through an "if…then" discussion until they realize that those effects are in fact negative.
Now, a word of caution: Let us think for a minute about those people we want on board. We probably need their permission or collaboration because they have some authority or responsibility in an area that is closely related to our change. It stands to reason, then, that if they have responsibility in an area related to the change, then they are also

at least partially responsible for the problem we are trying to solve. So, it might be that they are well aware that there is a problem in the current situation, but they refuse to acknowledge it in public because they don't want to be blamed for it. If this is the case, discussing different undesirable effects and demonstrating how harmful they are might give them the impression that we are blaming them for even more than they thought. It will be like pouring gas on a fire, causing them to resist us even more!

That is why we have to be extra careful in the way we approach the other party and in our choice of words. How do we know whether they are ignoring the problem because they are unaware of it or because they don't want to be blamed for it? If we listen well enough, we should know. Buy-in is as much about listening as it is about talking. But what if we are not sure? It is better in this case to play it safe and make very clear to the other side that no one is assigning blame, and all we want is to make things better for everyone.

Let's assume we have peeled away Layer 0 and have gotten the other party to acknowledge that there is a problem. Where do we go from here? Again, we have to listen. If we hear something like, "I see we have a problem, but what exactly is it?" or "Now that I think about it, the problem is different than what you are telling me," it means that we have moved to Layer 1 and should begin to discuss and get agreement on the problem. Sometimes we may find that, especially in small changes, once the other party realizes there is a problem, they are able simultaneously to recognize exactly what that problem is. In this case, we don't need to expend our energy and bore the other side with excessive explanations about the problem.

It is better to verify that we are talking about the same problem, realize that Layer 1 is also peeled away, and move on.

Layer 1. Disagreeing on the problem

People come from different backgrounds, have different roles, and have different agendas. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect different answers to the question of what should be improved in a given situation. As we mentioned earlier, it is rather difficult to reach an agreement on a solution unless the two (or more) parties agree on the problem first. If we approach Wary Will and say, "Watch out! There's an alligator behind you!" and he replies, "That's not an alligator, it's a vulture!" then what chance do we have to convince him that climbing up the cliff is a good idea?
I have heard people say that to avoid wasting time, it is better to discuss the solution right away and go back to Layer 1 only if during the discussion of the solution we realize that there is a discrepancy in our perceptions of the problem. This shortcut is risky because once we place our cards on the table and the other party objects to our solution, it will be harder to get them to admit they were wrong about the problem in the first place. It is therefore better to play our cards close to the chest to avoid giving

the other party the opportunity to object until we verify that we are both on the same page, as far as the problem is concerned.

So, how can we agree on the problem? One way to go about it is to discuss openly the party's assumptions of what the problem is. During such a discussion, we may realize that although we are tackling different problems, they are actually related. It may be that we are talking about the same problem using different terms, or that we are talking about a series of linked problems that should be addressed sequentially. Examining each party's perceptions of the problem enables us to reach agreement on what should be addressed, at which time we can move on from this Layer. Sometimes, if we cannot reconcile the different points of view, we may resort to negotiating whose problem will be dealt with first. It might work, but it also might result in a stalemate. We may be able to pre-empt this situation by preparing for it. Having different roles might mean that different people suffer from different undesirable effects that they mistakenly view as the main problem in the current situation. If we do not deal with the real core problem—the problem that is causing the various undesirable effects—we cannot fully remove those undesirable effects. That is why each TOC analysis begins with a search for the core problem that is causing the undesirable effects in the situation.

The TOC thinking tools that are designed to help uncover the core problem are the three-cloud approach and the *Current Reality Tree* (CRT). The buy-in effort can also benefit from this type of analysis. If we can show the other party that their problems, as well as ours, are all derivatives of the same core problem, we may be able to reconcile our different points of view and get consensus on focusing our efforts on the core problem. Whether it is conveyed in a formal presentation or a systematic conversation, getting people to realize what the core problem is and how it relates to their own undesirable effects is very effective in peeling away this Layer of Resistance and enabling us to move forward.

Here again we must be cautious about blaming. We already mentioned that the people we want on board might be sensitive to the subject we are raising. When we approach them to talk about the problem, we might inadvertently give the impression that we are blaming them for the problem. This can easily become the case if we just have an intuitive discussion about it and are not careful about what we say and how we say it. Now imagine what might happen if we approach them with a well prepared, logical analysis that shows how they are not only responsible for their own undesirable effects but are also responsible for the core problem that is causing everyone else grief and agony.

We might be—unintentionally, of course—forcing them into a corner, making them feel blamed or even attacked. And if they get defensive, what are the odds of all of us sailing smoothly toward a happy buy-in for our proposed change? Whether or not they should be blamed is irrelevant at this point. If we are serious about implementing the change, we have to put the issue of blame behind us. Instead, we must concentrate on how the

other party is going to perceive our motives for approaching them. They must not feel blamed. Ideally, we want to put them at ease so that they are receptive and positive about our initiative. Being careful about the words we use is the key! If we could also demonstrate that we understand what kept them from solving this problem before, all the better. TOC recommends verbalizing the problem in a conflict format (i.e., a cloud).

We want to show the other side not only that we are not here to blame them, but also that we actually understand the conflict in which they are trapped.
When we sense that all sides are on the same page as far as what the problem is, it usually means it's time to move on to discuss the solution. Except, however, for rare cases in which we bump against Layer 2.

Layer 2. The problem is out of my control

Thank goodness this Layer is rare because when it occurs it is very hard to overcome. Layer 2 describes those cases in which the other side insists that the problem is beyond their control and expects us to drop the whole thing. Wary Will tells us firmly, "My hands are tied. There is nothing I can do to help you," and refuses to hear another word on the matter. When we encounter responses such as these, we had better listen carefully to what the other party has to say.

Sometimes the other party is right and the problem is indeed beyond their span of authority. In order to solve the problem, therefore, we may have to speak to whoever has the power to solve that problem. However, we do not always have the option of approaching someone's superiors, which means we might be stuck.

What if they just say it and the problem is in fact under their control? Here we have a serious problem because they usually refuse to continue the discussion. But if we find a way to open a dialog, we can try to uncover their erroneous assumptions and get them to see the problem is solvable within the boundaries of their control. Or, we can try to convince them, despite their unwillingness, to listen to our solution and then reconsider whether they have the power to implement it.

Disagreement on the Solution
Layer 3. Disagreeing on the direction for the solution

There is often more than one way, more than one "direction" to solve the same problem. Wary Will will probably not help us climb the cliff if he prefers to stay and fight the alligator. Once we agree on the problem, we often bump into Layer 3 (see Fig. 20-3).

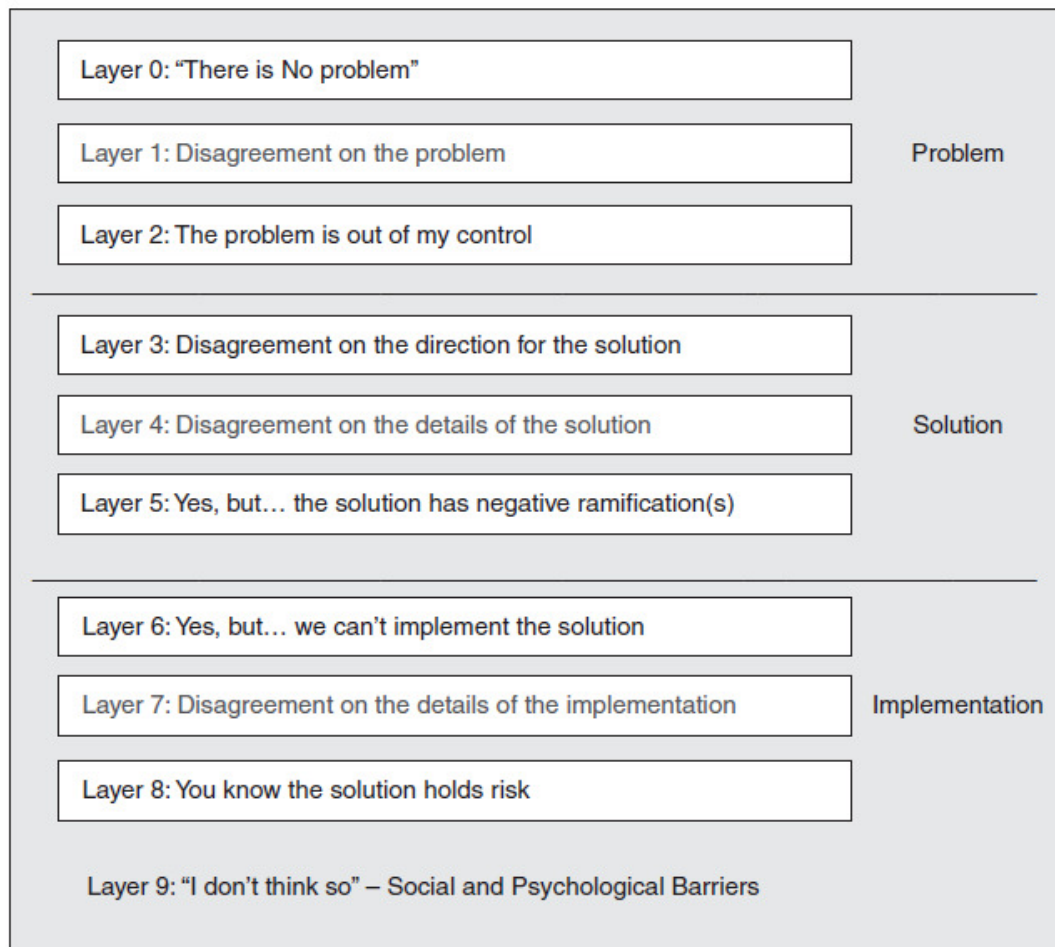|	
Layer 0: "There is No problem"	
Layer 1: Disagreement on the problem	Problem
Layer 2: The problem is out of my control	
Layer 3: Disagreement on the direction for the solution	
Layer 4: Disagreement on the details of the solution	Solution
Layer 5: Yes, but... the solution has negative ramification(s)	
Layer 6: Yes, but... we can't implement the solution	
Layer 7: Disagreement on the details of the implementation	Implementation
Layer 8: You know the solution holds risk	
Layer 9: "I don't think so" – Social and Psychological Barriers	

FIGURE 20-3   The TOC layers of resistance to change.

What happens in Layer 3 is that each party tries to convince everyone else to go their way. Each party insists that their direction for the solution is better than everyone else's and stubbornly refuses to hear anyone else out. If no one agrees on the direction, there is no point in detailing any of them.

If we anticipate such trouble, we had better come prepared. We need to invest in putting together a list of criteria for what would be considered a good solution. This list may include items such as achieving the opposite of some of the main undesirable effects, meeting the important needs of the involved parties, and avoiding significant negative ramifications.

After we present the criteria and agree on them, we should review the directions for the solutions that people have put forth. Since we have invested in identifying the core problem and devised a good solution for it (and we are the ones who wrote the list of good criteria), we have a far better chance of meeting the criteria than our

counterparts. And what if we haven't? Well, perhaps we should realize that their direction for the solution is better than ours is, and proceed accordingly.

It might seem like putting together a list of criteria for a good solution is just a hassle. Why not simply discuss each solution to judge its merit? Many times putting this list together is indeed an "overachievement," where an intuitive discussion would suffice. But sometimes taking this extra step can make or break our problem solving. It is easy to imagine scenarios involving, well, human nature: If we start comparing solutions, the discussion bears the risk of becoming personal (and emotional) fairly quickly ("mine is bigger than yours!"—sound familiar?).

The more we compare and judge, the harder each participant will hold on to and fight for their solution, which makes it much harder to maintain a civil discussion, let alone reach a consensus. A list of good criteria upon which everyone agrees in advance before reviewing any of the solutions serves as a logical fencepost to which we can all refer back. Looking at each solution alongside the list of criteria will help us conduct a practical, rather than personal, discussion. This way we hope that we can let go of the directions that are less desirable and get consensus on one direction. Once we are in agreement on which direction we should take, Layer 3 is peeled away and we can move on.

Layer 4. Disagreeing on the details of the solution

It's important to peel away Layer 3 (the direction for solution) and Layer 4 (the details of the solution) separately when we are facing a change on a large scale that probably has more than one direction for solution and in which there are many details involved in each direction. With smaller, simpler changes, the direction and the details tend to merge into one discussion about the solution, and trying to keep them separate becomes superficial.

In this Layer we may hear people say, "Your solution is not good enough," "It does not address the entire problem," "This is a terrible solution! It doesn't cover x, y, or z." People agree to our direction for a solution, but claim the solution is not yet complete; it does not achieve all the desired results. Instead of spelling the doom of our project, such objections actually enable us to check whether we have constructed a comprehensive solution to the problem or we have missed something. We should swallow our resentment toward the other party for poking holes in our precious solution, and instead evaluate their comments as openly (and neutrally) as possible. If their concern is not valid, we should further explain our solution until they see that it is designed to achieve the benefit they pointed out. And if they were right, we should thank them for opening our eyes at this early stage and alter our solution in accordance with their suggestions.

What if we fail to resolve the other party's issues? If it seems that our plan will fail to achieve a significant benefit, we have to be open enough to re-evaluate our solution and see if it is as good as we thought it was. Maybe we should go back to Layer 3 and choose a different direction for the solution. If we want the other side to evaluate the merit of our suggested change objectively, then we, too, must be objective about it, not blinded by our enthusiasm or sense of ownership.

The other party may bring up more than one desired outcome they suspect is missing. If we are determined to get the other party's full collaboration (and get the most out of the change), we should listen to what they have to say, determine which significant benefits are missing, and discuss how to modify the change in order to achieve these outcomes as well. One way to systematically overcome this Layer is by first getting consensus on all the benefits (or the "desired effects") that the change should bring. To do this, simply write down the opposite of each undesirable effect that was brought up during the discussion of the problem. Then review each desirable effect to determine whether the change is designed to attain it. If one or more of these significant benefits was indeed neglected, we should alter the change to address it. The TOC thinking tool that may assist us here is the *Future Reality Tree* (FRT).

Layer 5. "Yes, but... " The solution has negative ramifications

Once we agree on the solution and believe we have covered all its angles, we are eager to start talking about the implementation steps. This is why we have to take a deep breath when we hear the next expected response—the "yes, but" concerns. "Yes it all sounds good, but you do realize that if we go ahead with this we will end up suffering from...," they say. I have yet to see one buy-in effort where the initiator did not spend a considerable amount of energy dealing with this Layer. If the other party feels our solution might cause damage, there is little chance they will be willing to collaborate. We must take the time to understand what their concern is and why they claim it is an unavoidable result of our suggested solution. If their concern holds water, we had better address it, and if it does not we should clarify why that is. The TOC tool that is designed to help at this stage is the *Negative Branch* (NBR).

The other party may bring up more than one negative ramification they suspect the change will have. The bigger the change and the more people involved, the more "vulnerable" we are to objections at this Layer. In our haste to complete the buy-in effort, we might look into and address one concern, assume that one small adjustment is enough to overcome this Layer, and move on. This is a grave mistake. If we have not addressed every objection raised at this stage, the solution will seem harmful and woefully inadequate to the task of solving the problem. Needless to say, the other party will not buy it.

There is no getting around it: We must spend as much time and effort as it takes on this

Layer until everyone agrees that the solution does not have any significant negative ramifications.

Speaking of negative ramifications, the other party may bring up another type of "Yes, but…" at this point. In this scenario, they may claim that implementing our solution will require them to give up something positive that they already have. Wary Will may realize that by joining us in climbing the cliff, he will have to leave his beloved mermaid behind. No one said a win-win solution was perfect. Sometimes in order to gain new benefits we need to give up ones we have previously enjoyed. At this point in the process, we probably will have already resolved this issue with ourselves and decided that the advantages of the solution are worth giving up some positives. But we cannot make that decision for the other party. Thus, if we truly need them on our side we must convince the other party that the advantages of our solution are worth the price they will pay.

At this point, we already agreed with the other party on what the problem is, and we agreed that the solution we proposed is a good solution. According to TOC, a *good solution* is defined as one that adequately solves the problem without creating new significant problems.

In Layers 3 and 4, we verified that our solution will properly address the problem and Layer 5 took care of the negative ramifications. Only now does it make sense to move forward to discuss the implementation.

Disagreement on the Implementation
Layer 6: Yes, but… we can't implement the solution

"Yes, but you'll never make it," "It is all fine and dandy but impossible to implement," "It's a terrible solution, you'll never get past x, y, or z." At first it is difficult to tell Layer 6 from Layer 5 because they both sound the same. However, the objections in those two Layers are very different from one another. In Layer 5, we have not yet agreed that the solution about which we are talking is a good solution. We are still debating about whether it has negative ramifications. In Layer 6, we have already agreed that this is a good solution and we are contemplating how to implement it. People tend to confuse these two Layers more than they confuse any of the others, which results in an ineffective bouncing between objections and a frustrating delay in the buy-in effort.

The logical order in which to address these two layers is clear: There is no sense discussing obstacles in the implementation before we agree that this is a change we wish to implement. So, once we go into the "Yes, but…" phase, we need to tune our ears to identify to which Layer the objection belongs, agree with the other party to first address all the negative ramifications, and only then talk about obstacles to the implementation.

The way to distinguish between the two types of "Yes, but…" is to ask ourselves, "Is this something that might happen if we implement the change?" (negative ramification), or "Is this blocking me from achieving the change?" (obstacle). Needless to say, if the other party doesn't believe that our solution is practical, then there is little chance that they will give us their blessing, so we have no choice but to address all of the obstacles they bring up.

As in Layer 5, we have the option between cursing them silently for being a pain or thanking them for making us plan better and face less unpleasant surprises once we go into action. Usually the bigger the change, the more obstacles we face. And once the obstacles start to mount, we need to sort them out— which obstacles can be tackled in parallel and which have to be dealt with in sequence. The TOC tools that might help at this stage are the *Prerequisite Tree* (PRT) or, in large projects, the *Strategy and Tactic Tree* (S&T).

Layer 7: Disagreement on the details of the implementation

As in the case of Layers 3 (direction for solution) and 4 (details of the solution), Layers 6 (obstacles to the implementation) and 7 (details of implementation) should be addressed separately when planning large-scale changes. In small changes, they tend to merge into one Layer that covers our attempt to reach an agreement on the implementation plan. At Layer 7, we discuss and get consensus on the little details: schedules, due dates, assigning roles and responsibilities, budget, resources, etc.

Deciding "who does what" is something we all do fairly well. However, we should not neglect the "why." Explaining the logic behind our decisions is not only helpful in convincing people that our plans make sense, it also facilitates high performance. We can be as nitty-gritty as we possibly can, detailing exactly what to do where and when, but reality may not turn out the way we expect it to and these details might be worthless. Change holds considerable uncertainty and the effective way to handle it is not by presenting tiny specifications but by providing the "why."

If people understand why we want them to do something, what each step is aimed to achieve, and why they need to do it before moving to the next step, they will be in a much better position to improvise successfully when reality doesn't turn out the way we expected it to. The TOC tool that may be helpful in conveying the "why" of the various Implementation steps is the *Transition Tree* (TRT). Delegating tasks in this way tends to motivate people, which also has a positive impact on their willingness to collaborate.

Layer 8: You know the solution holds risk

As we go through Layers 6 (obstacles to the implementation) and 7 (details of the implementation), the other party may become aware of possible risks that we take if we decide to go ahead with the change. Wary Will realizes that we want him to climb up a

shaky ladder and he immediately responds, "I don't know about that, I might break a leg." As long as the other party believes the risk is not worth it, we are in trouble. It is up to us to discuss each risk they bring up and think how we can lower it by making some changes (e.g., fixing the ladder for Will) or creating safety nets (e.g., placing a mattress below the ladder).

If we can't find a way to lower the risk, we need to reconsider the way we decided to implement the change (maybe there is an available zeppelin in the area?). If we can't find a way around that risk, we might end up in a position where we need to weigh the risk against the potential damage of canceling the plans for implementing our solution and see what will be the best course of action. Needless to say, if we want the other person's collaboration, we had better convince them that we have made the right decision.

Going through this buy-in process significantly improves the odds of convincing the other party to go along with us. The logical order and the intuition to know where to pause and how to handle each type of objection provides us with a way to better master this dialogue.

Utilizing the Layers of Resistance also gives us much more control than we would have if we conducted such discussions in the intuitive way. In the intuitive way, after we present the change we usually resort to addressing whatever objections the other side raises, so we are actually giving them control over the discussion. Utilizing the Layers allows us to know which layer we are in and what we should talk about, so that when they raise another objection we can tell if it belongs to an earlier Layer or to a later one.

We then know if we need to go back, or we need to show the other party we heard them (preferably write their objection down), and explain why it makes sense to postpone dealing with it until a later stage. This way we remain in a better position to steer the conversation.

And what if we got this far, covered all eight Layers, and the other party still resists? Here again we have to listen very carefully to what they say. The first thing we have to consider is that we may have lost them at an earlier stage and they are still stuck there. If this is the case, evidently we need to go back and pick up the ball from where we dropped it.

Another cause for resistance at this point is that they simply need time. Often people are not comfortable with giving their blessing right away. They need to take their time to think it over and after they get used to the idea they will most probably come back to us with a positive answer. If it is not a problem at an earlier layer and it's not the need to digest, resistance at this point means we clashed against Layer 9.

Layer 9: "I don't think so"—Social and psychological barriers

The Layers of Resistance provide order to the objections that relate directly to the change at hand (i.e., inherent objections). However, we cannot ignore the fact that people may also resist due to reasons that are not inherent to our change (i.e., external reasons). As was mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, people may possess personality traits that make them more prone to resist change. People may feel pushed out of their comfort zone and resist the excessive (perceived) uncertainty. People may resist because of social pressure or because they conform to social norms that our solution challenges, or because of various other reasons. Whatever the external reason is, it may stand in our way from the very beginning of the buy-in process, but as long as we haven't addressed the inherent objections, we should not focus on it (see again Fig. 20-3). As tempting as it may be to cling to it, all it does is lead us to blame the other party instead of take the responsibility to buy them in.

Think, for example, of a case where we would need to present an innovative change that contradicts the way things have always been done. Let's assume that we detect fairly quickly that the other party objects because they prefer to stick to tradition and conform to the way others in the field behave. One way to react is to call them "conservative" or even "primitive" and . . . and then what? Another way to handle the situation is to have faith that this external reason might not block us but merely slow us down. We should acknowledge it might take more effort, but nevertheless attempt to buy them in. If conservatism is their only reason for resisting the change, often we find that these people eventually come around; they realize there is a problem in the current state of affairs and even if our solution contradicts the traditional way of doing things, it is in fact the right thing to do. The earlier we detect an external reason for resisting, the better we can fine-tune our approach in order to overcome it.

We use the Layers of Resistance while keeping the external reason in mind. For example, if we realize we are pushing people out of their comfort zone we should continually ask them what information they are lacking, and discuss how to make things easier for them in the implementation stage by using demonstrations, pilots, etc. Or, if we realize we are talking to a person who needs to be in control (and we can't go around them or shoot them), we have to alter our approach to give them more control – both in the buy-in discussion and in the implementation of the change.

When we bump into Layer 9, it means that we have done our best to take the other party through the Layers that deal with objections inherent to our change, and we are now convinced that the reason they still resist is external to our change. In this situation, we should identify the external reason for resistance if we haven't done so earlier, and attempt to address it. The purpose of this chapter, however, is not to cover a comprehensive list of external causes for resistance to change, as there is plenty of literature on the subject.

Sense of Ownership: The Key to True Buy-In

There is one type of change people are truly excited about—their own initiatives. As we are well aware, psychological ownership ("this is MINE!") plays a key role in people's enthusiasm and commitment. Thus, the more important the change is to us and the more collaboration we need from the other party, the more we should invest in making them feel this is "their" change too. The problem is that when we initially ask for their collaboration, they have no sense of ownership; they feel as if they have nothing to do with this change. How do we cultivate this feeling? A sense of ownership may emerge through various related routes (see, for example, Pierce et al., 20012).

Using the Layers of Resistance can be an excellent way to build a sense of ownership; that is, if we are truly willing to share the ownership of our change with others. The way to go about this is to set aside our egos and learn to welcome inquiries and objections. After we present our ideas in each Layer, we need to encourage the other party to ask questions. This is *not* about asking questions for the sake of asking questions. This is about encouraging the other party to speak their mind so we know what is truly bothering them.

Discussing what is bothering them and clarifying the missing details is what will help them become familiar with the change. In addition—and this is the key to the whole thing—we have to evaluate their objections objectively. Keeping an open mind, we will find that at least some of their concerns hold water. If we accept their reservations and ask for *their* input of how to overcome them, we give them control over current decisions and future actions. The more we acknowledge their (valid!) reservations and incorporate their suggestions into the change plans, the more it will become their change too.

Even if we have effectively identified the problem and come up with a reasonable solution, the other party will most probably raise valid concerns in Layer 5 and real obstacles in Layer 6. Instead of trying to dispute these concerns, we should view them as excellent opportunities for building the other party's sense of ownership. When such a discussion is done well, the other party feels more involved and more willing to participate once we get to Layer 7. If at that point they assume responsibility and start taking charge in reviewing the little details, we know we have made it.

Another issue that should be discussed here is the issue of fairness. The other party may have resisted our change all along because they have been trying to get more out of it for themselves. They might believe they deserve more because they have invested a lot in the past and feel they weren't adequately compensated, suspect they will be asked to invest a lot in implementing the change, or might believe that others receive more. The issue of fair compensation for their efforts or fair distribution of the expected outcome from the change might be especially complicated if we are dealing with a group of people—the ones who expect to invest more in the implementation of the change and

claim they deserve more based on their contribution, the ones in the middle who will advocate the equality principle, and the weak ones who expect to contribute the least and will claim they deserve more because of their special needs. The issue of what is fair and not fair is a muddy swamp. If we go there, we are much more likely to drown than float. What might help is to build peoples' sense of ownership in the change. If *they* offer to help or *they* decide they would like to invest more, the issue of fairness may not come up.

Apart from promoting a sense of ownership, there is another big advantage to welcoming objections and evaluating them objectively. We have all implemented changes we were excited about just to find out later that they were "half baked" and did not yield all the desired results. If we truly listen, there is a good chance that other people might be on to something that we have missed—thus, they increase our chances of implementing a well planned change and fully enjoying its results.

Bottom Line

Reading about this buy-in process might give the impression that persuading people is a complicated task that takes a lot of work. Well, sometimes it does, but let's put things in perspective. Most everyday changes are local, small changes that require no more than a good open discussion. In this type of change, we usually encounter no more than three or four Layers. By being aware of them, the discussion tends to be more focused and the buy-in effort actually takes less work.

When we face a large-scale change, things are different. Here, we might need to invest a significant amount of time in preparing our presentation and planning how to conduct the buy-in discussion. When faced with these preparations, we might think that it is too much effort and decide to "wing it." The perception of this effort being "too much" comes from comparing the time we need to prepare to the time it will take to "wing it."

But if we look at the big picture, what we should compare is the time it will take to prepare our analysis and discuss our arguments to the time, effort, and agony we will go through convincing the other side to say yes (and we may never even hear that blessed word!) if we don't prepare. Try to recall a time when you have encountered resistance and how hard you worked to get the other party to collaborate. If only you had done a little more homework before you had leapt in ….

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