

Organizational Champions and their “Magic Secrets”: Transforming Implicit Conflict Mitigation Strategies

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Abstract

Many organizations and institutions are fraught with interdepartmental conflicts that may become culturally embedded to create perpetually strained relations. Some employees emerge as organizational champions to move beyond the boundaries of their respective units regardless of pervasive conflicted interdepartmental relationships. They serve as catalysts to create novel interdepartmental projects that foster collaborative partnerships. Through the development of such initiatives, organizational champions dismantle the protracted interdepartmental conflict and consequently build a positive attractor¹ outside established modes of conducting business. Through the creation of positive intergroup exchanges, they introduce a process that contributes to interdepartmental knowledge flows, relationships, and ultimately organizational culture shifts. Five case study interviews were conducted with organizational champions employed at middle management and senior executive levels at an Ivy League institution to uncover their implicit conflict mitigation tactics. The researcher molds their implicit conflict frameworks and strategies into the Organizational Champion Conflict Mitigation Model (OCCMM) introducing a peacebuilding orientation to the construction of collaborative workplace culture and organizational change.

¹ Sources: Nowak & Lewenstein (1994), Nowak & Vallacher (1998a), Coleman et. al (2006)

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Introduction

Intergroup conflict is an inevitable aspect to complex organizations. An intrinsic paradox of the structural design of organizations is the work is divided into groups that develop normative practices, independent goals, and operating procedures, yet the work needs to be coordinated and integrated with various differentiated subsystems (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Rahim, M.A., 2001; Burke, 2006). The interdepartmental interdependence to achieve organizational goals can instigate and perpetuate conflict between two or more heterogeneous subsystems with clashing standards or established processes (Rahim, M.A., 2001). Consequently, organizational silos form to become a predominant characteristic of the workplace cultural landscape thereby contributing to organizational inefficiency where the overall organizational effectiveness suffers (Burke, 2006). The lack of communication transparency between workplace units may lead to devastating results. Crises such as 9/11 and the BP oil spill reinforce the need to continue to research organizational conflict to better understand how to maintain collaborative partnerships and particularly knowledge flows between organizational units.

A pervasive explanation of the process of intergroup organizational conflict may in part lay in social identity theory (Tajfel, 1970). Tajfel (1970) posits that individuals tend to classify themselves and others into social categories and ultimately compare their in-group more favorably than their out-group members even in the absence of intergroup conflict. Group identity produces a cohesive structure that is a powerful force to foster conformity and “group think” (Fisher, 2006). Janis (1982) articulates that cohesiveness is a predominating factor of the “group think” phenomenon where an insular group under stress pushes for uniform agreement that will override realistic or moral determinants to the decision making process. Regardless of

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the press for coherence in group thought and behavior, sometimes individuals emerge in organizations that challenge the in-group norms and inspire organizational change by introducing a novel project that fosters interdepartmental collaboration.

The literature offers a diverse range of labels for these individuals: boundary spanners (Ancona & Cadwell, 1990), entrepreneurs (Kanter, 1983), intrepeneurs (Kanter, 1989), and champions (Schon 1963, Markham 1998, 2000). In his book The Organizational Champion: How to Develop Passionate Change Agents at Every Level, Mark Thompson (2009) defines organizational champions as “enlightened change makers who are personally committed to mutual values, rather than self-centered ones, and relentlessly driven by possibilities.” Thompson’s characterization captures the essence of an organizational champion. Howell and Higgins (1990) demonstrate that champions report using more transformational leadership behaviors to a significantly greater extent than non-champions. Drawing on previous literature, the researcher defines an organizational champion is an individual that demonstrates transformational leadership behaviors (inspirational influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) and serves as a catalyst for a novel interdepartmental project that generates support from people in the organization (Howell and Higgins, 1990; Barbuto, 2005). The champion’s critical contribution is generating project support from other people throughout the organization and this prime characteristic delineates a champion from a team member, a manager acting from a role, or high-manager delegating the initiative (Markham & Aiman-Smith, 2001).

The literature on champions is relatively sparse. Much of the research focuses on the psychological and behavioral attributes of champions (Howell & Higgins, 1990; Day, 1994), and their relationship with conflict is an unexplored phenomenon. The present study explores

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organizational champions' relationship with conflict in the process of developing an interdepartmental project in a higher education institution. Understanding their conflict processes and interaction styles, and the conditions in which they flourish or expire is crucial for organizations. They may provide a mechanism to ensure interdepartmental knowledge flows remain an integral aspect to the organizational culture. Learning about their relationship with conflict from a holistic framework may present a new awareness about clues in the system that inspires particular approaches- possibly even foreshadow dysfunctional dynamics in the organization that need attention from senior management. For this reason, it is especially important to identify organizational champions at mid-management professional levels within the organization. Due to the organizational champion's persuasive power to rally collegial support, senior executives will want to locate, harness, and develop such individuals in the organization and notice when there is a systematic dysfunctional dynamic occurring within the organizational culture by examining the organizational champion's movements. Organizational champions may provide the fiber to create and maintain positive attractor spaces for interdepartmental connectivity (Nowak & Lewenstein, 1994; Nowak & Vallacher, 1998a; Coleman et. al, 2006). Comprehending their conflict application strategies and methods is an unexplored phenomenon that warrants an investigation.

Praszkier et al. (2010) explores how social entrepreneurs from Ashoka introduce constructive change outside the conflict landscape in a manner that shifts society (groups, communities) toward higher levels of trust and cooperation. Instead of attacking a conflict directly, they channel their efforts to creating cooperative settings "somewhere else" (Praszkier et al., 2010). This offers an insight that translates in the investigation of the role of the champion in a non-profit organization. In the creation of an interdepartmental project, the organizational

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champion serves as a catalyst to foster collaborative relationships across the organization producing a positive attractor for future exchanges (Praszkier et al., 2010). Like social entrepreneurs, organizational champions dismantle conflict by creating these positive collaborative clusters via interdepartmental work initiatives and ultimately prime the organization for culture shifts. Although champions may embrace discord in discourse (Thompson, 2009), they create initiatives generating support from people in the organization that consequently serves as a means to constructive change and an indirect method to peacebuilding within the organization.

Social Entrepreneurship- a Peacebuilding Approach to Conflict

In keeping with Praszkier's et al. (2010) study on Ashoka's social entrepreneurs, organizational champions in a higher education setting will likely demonstrate a similar approach to conflict in their navigation of the institutional terrain. The father of social entrepreneurship education Greg Dees argues that entrepreneurs improve the productive capacity of society and provides the "creative destruction" that propels economic change, and he holds that social entrepreneurs do the same for social change (Bornstein & Davis, 2010). Dees maintains that social entrepreneurs create new combinations of people and resources that significantly improve society's capacity to address problems (Bornstein & Davis, 2010). Organizational champions in higher education settings are set within circumstances similar to social entrepreneurs, since financial incentive is not necessarily a motivating element to their involvement in championing initiatives. In a for-profit business there is likely personal financial incentive for bonus pools and promotions that are not available to a social entrepreneur or organizational champion. Social entrepreneurs intentionally cultivate relationships with people across political camps and from a variety of backgrounds so they can better understand how to navigate change (Bornstein &

Davis, 2010). Organizational champions demonstrate a similar tactic of cultivating relationships across the institution that significantly assists in their ability to mobilize people and resources to indirectly address organizational problems.

Social Capital and Interdepartmental Bridges

Forming interdepartmental relationships is a crucial feature of the organizational champion's ability to navigate the landscape. Individuals' good citizenship behaviors in organizations help to create organizational social capital that positively affects firm performance (Bolino et al., 2002). Therefore it is imperative to investigate the organizational network with particular attention to the organizational champion's social capital and capacity to serve as a bridge to connect otherwise fragmented social groups within the institution. Social capital can be defined as the benefits that accrue due to the maintenance of positive relations between different groups, organizational units or hierarchical levels (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003). In consideration of the organizational champion's ability to inspire buy-in from individuals at various professional levels and in different departments, they may likely increase their social capital by stepping into a liaison role to bridge two otherwise disjointed units (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003). By their ability to accrue social capital and serve as interdepartmental bridges, organizational champions may serve as effective peacebuilders in the organization.

Dynamical Systems Theory- Building Positive Collaborative Attractors

In addition to concepts ascribed to social network theory (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003; Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973, 1985) aspects of dynamical systems theory (Nowak & Lewenstein, 1994; Nowak & Vallacher, 1998) were applied as a framework to discover how organizational champions navigate the landscape. The paradigm of dynamical social psychology offers insight into to why social systems typically shift to previously established states regardless of change

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attempts- these stable states are named attractors (Praszkier et al., 2010). In effect, an attractor operates like a magnet or “attracts” the system’s dynamics, and attempting to move the system out of its attractor state promotes forces that reinstate the system to its attractor (Vallacher & Nowak 2007). Dynamical social psychology proposes that change may occur as a consequence of building new attractors toward which the system will ultimately shift (Vallacher & Nowak, 2007).

In the context of this investigation, an organizational champion- in addition to operating as an interdepartmental bridge- may serve as a catalyst to cultivate other interdepartmental relationships and communication flows potentially creating a collaborative hub in the organization. Therefore, a positive attractor may build in the organizational system. When a system is at one of its attractor states, other attractors for the system’s behavior may not be visible to observers (Vallacher & Nowak, 2007). The existence of this potential state in the system is called a latent attractor, and it is an important feature to assess over time what states are possible for the system when conditions change (Vallacher & Nowak, 2007). This concept is particularly useful when conceptualizing potential organizational change or culture shifts. In addition to addressing conflicts in an organizational system by hiring external consultants for example, it may be fruitful to also identify and trace the organizational champion’s movements in the system to support the internal creation of a positive attractor to mitigate potential conflict.

Emergence- Fostering Collaborative Behavior

Another feature of dynamical social psychology that emphasizes this point is emergence. Emergence is due to self-organization among elements, where each element adjusts to the current state of other elements (Vallacher & Novak, 2007). This concept has implications for achieving a higher-order structure at various levels of social reality. Shared group norms and beliefs often

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develop through the spontaneous coordination of group members' impulses and actions, without higher level authoritative intervention to impose rules (Durkheim, 1938; Turner & Killian, 1957). In consideration of the organizational champion's capacity to create new collaborative interdepartmental networks, the property of emergence presents an opportunity to develop the positive attractor in organizational system without a top-down mandate from leadership. The organizational champion may create buy-in from colleagues at a mid-manager level in the system, slowly shaping a new collaborative model for conducting business. Since the self-organizing nature of groups and specifically how groups coordinate to overarching values and goals define the social system in which they are embedded (Nowak & Vallacher, 2001), the property of emergence has powerful implications for organizations- especially organizations that display strained relations between employees from different departments.

Over the past several years, the principles of dynamical systems have been employed to capture the dynamics of intractable conflict (Coleman, P.T., Bui-Wrzonsinksa L., Vallacher, R. & Nowak, A., 2006; Coleman, P.T., Vallacher, R., Nowak, A., & Bui-Wrzonsinksa, 2007). Coleman (2003) defines a conflict with seeming immunity to resolution as intractable, and intractable conflicts exist in families, organizations, and nations. The dynamical systems approach to conflict resolution seeks to transform the system from the coordinated dynamics perpetuating the conflict to a different coherent (attractor) state that allows for a neutral (or positive) rapport between parties. The current investigation does not seek to focus on intractable conflicts. However, the dynamical systems framework offers a useful and effective lens to map how the organizational champion navigates the landscape from various levels in the system- individual, department, and organization. Ultimately, mapping the various elements in the system that affects the organizational champion's experience creating an interdepartmental

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project will help to identify common themes in the data analysis. By applying the holistic framework to locate common themes between organizational champions, the intent is to learn how best to identify what conflict strategies organizational champions apply as they traverse the organizational landscape.

Research Methodology

Interviews were conducted with five mid-manager to senior executive level professionals identified as organizational champions by their colleagues at an Ivy League institution. Participants were asked to reflect on an interdepartmental project he or she initiated and explain the process. A series of questions were asked to explore their experience with conflict on individual, department, and organizational levels thereby investigating the various conflict strategies they employ based on the relative power and goal interdependence. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed by hand. A collective case study approach was employed to analyze the data to code of themes.

Data Analysis and Interpretation- “Um, Conflict?”

In sum, the data demonstrates there are substantial similarities in the fashion in which organizational champions are intrinsically operating through the organizational landscape by collaborative means. Many of the tools they employ such as active listening and mutual incentives to champion support are skills sets taught in mediation centers and conflict resolution master’s degree programs. Although participants share comments about their aptitude for self-reflection, they did not exhibit an awareness of how the tools they naturally employ are defined strategies for mitigating or resolving conflict. In fact, one participant concludes the interview with the remark “I don’t think I’ve ever thought about it that much...that whole process, I definitely haven’t really reflected or verbalized any of this.”

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The question that created the most notable shift in behavior and speech relates to the last question in the interview: “How do you experience and/or characterize conflict in the process of creating the interdepartmental initiative?” Participants paused and an answer wasn’t immediately available. The speech didn’t flow as seamlessly and there were noticeably more pauses and phrases such as “um” integrated into the answer. Although they are all extremely effective and talented communicators, when asked directly about how they experience and handle conflict they pause to reflect. In consideration of the conversations holistically, the researcher perceives that the term “conflict” has a connotation that provokes an experience that organizational champions do not typically encounter in their professional environment championing an initiative. Although, this is not to say that they do not acknowledge the word as noted by one senior executive “um...always some kind of conflict...um, I don’t have any, um...magic secrets about that.” Although she affirms that one should not “ignore conflict and hope it will go away,” she also states that a colleague perceives she may be “too patient” on some issues and that she “should have pushed harder to get some things to change sooner.” One may frame this exchange as a conflict. However, the participant does not position it as such and ends with “I don’t know. It’s one of those things.” And, “one of those things” isn’t a situation to take a combative stance.

Organizational champions are not conscious that they collectively embody a unique set of implicit (unarticulated beliefs and ideals) conflict resolution strategies, processes, and frameworks (Coleman, 2004). Although they verbalize the actions and skills they employ, they are not explicitly aware of how these inherent practices from which they navigate the organizational landscape serve to mitigate conflict. However, they convey that they possess strong implicit beliefs. When asked a question regarding how did she know that she couldn’t

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explicitly express an announcement to restructure the university development operations, the participant emphatically and firmly states “because that is not how people behave” and later shares that “you can’t mandate collaboration.” These sentiments reflect her strong implicit core beliefs.

Implicit theories operate similarly to a scientific model challenging our attention to guide the manner in which we process and understand information about the self, other people, and social situations (Coleman, 2004). Implicit theories foster the creation of meaning system that orients individuals toward “goals, strategies, attributions, evaluations, reactions, and particular interpretations of events (Coleman, 2004; Dweck, 1996). Since organizational champions exhibit such an inherent talent for navigating the organizational landscape making organizational champions explicitly aware of their processes will provide valuable strategic information- not only for them- but potentially the organization.

Maximizing Organizational Champions Strategies

Organizational champions exhibit implicit concepts in regard to conflict that translate into demonstratively useful strategies to employ in the organizational arena. Organizational champions demonstrate their agility to develop interdepartmental initiatives that take root within the organization by collaboration. Via their implicit methods they mitigate conflict situations from blossoming into protracted issues. Even if the particular initiative doesn’t fully evolve to the organizational champion’s intended result, the evidence shows they are undoubtedly affecting the landscape of the organization. They demonstrate they have potential to build latent positive attractors that may ultimately assist in the development of culture shifts. If this is the case, an unexplored terrain lay ahead in capturing these implicit attitudes to transform them into an explicit and useful design system.

The Organizational Champion Conflict Mitigation Model (OCCMM)

Since the organizational champion is quite effective in conflict mitigation, there is a need to map their strategic process and effective collaborative behaviors into a comprehensive model. This step is necessary to transform implicit conflict mitigation strategies into an explicit context for organizational champions and managers. Based on the qualitative research, the researcher proposes an Organizational Champion Conflict Mitigation Model (Appendix A) that are based on four key principles: Core Relating, Timeline & Process, Strategic Collaboration, and Acknowledging Resistance.

Core Relating

Participants expressed that relationships are central to the experience of championing an interdepartmental project. However, their proclivity to form and develop professional relationships begins prior to the actual process of initiating an interdepartmental project. They develop relationships with people at many professional levels within the organizational landscape and express a talent for individualized understanding. This ability leads them to build social capital within the organization and serve as a bridge to various units ultimately leveraging their interpersonal relationships. In addition to their skill for interpersonal relationship building, they express a shared understanding of intergroup dynamics. All participants shared a background in social psychology or sociology. They exude a competence and confidence in understanding human behavior.

There are four strategies to Core Relating. Develop relationships throughout the organization by engaging in “small talk” and meet casually without a work agenda. Engage colleagues with authenticity, practice active listening, and ask questions with the main intent of developing empathy- “put yourself in their shoes.” Learn about fundamental social psychology

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and organizational intergroup dynamics. Recognize that developing a positive relational reputation contributes to more credit in the back and social capital in the system. Building relationships outside the respective professional unit helps to develop the position as a bridge in the organization. Learn how to leverage that position to develop more social capital by connecting and introducing colleagues when useful for others.

The four Core Relating strategies are:

- Small Talk- Collegial chat without an agenda
- Empathy- Ask questions, listen, and learn what is important to the other party
- Intergroup Dynamics Awareness- Do homework on intergroup dynamics
- Leverage Connections- Connect unconnected colleagues and raise social capital

Timeline & Process

The participants report a similar process to the creation of an interdepartmental initiative. Although relationships are at the core of their process (one that entails building from a collaborative framework) they also share a common identification with thinking from an organizational perspective. They are savvy to acknowledge the elements (particularly partnerships) that are instrumental in the development of the initiative. Additionally, they express an understanding of what features affect the organizational system, and communicate and act in accordance to those features.

The second principle of the OCCMM is to observe a strategic Timeline and Process to develop an interdepartmental initiative. The first step is to reflect on an organizational need to locate an idea. Implementing Core Relating strategies are critical in this process. By active listening and learning more about colleagues needs, more information becomes available to conceive of an idea to better an organizational process. This is why conversing outside of respective units is so important. By Core Relating a plethora of casual relationships begin to develop. This established casual rapport translates to sharing professional perspectives with

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colleagues from different units. This action helps to develop the idea from a variety of vantage points thereby establishing mutual incentives during the incubation period of the initiative.

The research demonstrates the importance of have a supervisor's support. It is also possible to develop that support indirectly through other relationships. If the boss's peers, colleagues, and supervisor like the idea there is more of a reason to move forward. However, moving above a supervisor's head should always be sensitively handled. Form a strategic alliance(s), and this partnership may be the direct supervisor. It is important to remain patient and know the system. Reflect on the information learned from Core Relating from both an individual and departmental standpoint. This outlines the key steps in the Timeline and Process for building an interdepartmental initiative, and it is critical to note that the next principle- Strategic Collaboration offers crucial insight on how best to foster and maximize the potential for the initiative to move beyond the incubation stage.

The five Timeline & Process strategies are:

- Organizational Need Identification- Locate an idea, best if can serve multiple parties
- Move Outside of Your Unit- Employ Core Relating principles to learn information about individuals and respective organizational dynamics (comb the landscape for mutual incentives)
- Boss on Board- Champion the boss's support
- Strategic Alliance- Find a partner(s) interested in the initiative; it can be a boss or direct report
- Know the System and Be Patient- Recognize a personal timeline is not one that others or the organizations adheres to, so be patient and flexible

Strategic Collaboration

With a proclivity toward interpersonal relationship building and individualized understanding in concert with the organizational champion's expressed understanding of group dynamics, a key facet to the process of building an interdepartmental initiative is how they intuitively build from a collaborative framework to create buy-in- particularly searching for and

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offering mutual incentive(s) for parties to participate. To increase probability that the initiative moves beyond the incubation stage the key principles of strategic collaboration are crucial. Strategic collaboration is a core process embedded within the timeline of the initiative. Combing the landscape for mutual incentives when discussing the idea in the “Move Outside of Your Unit” stage during the Timeline & Process principle is a critical aspect to building an interdepartmental initiative, and it is best if the initiative sparks the interest of a direct supervisor and/or other influencing parties such as the boss of your direct supervisor. The Core Relating principles are also adhered to throughout the process.

There are five Strategic Collaboration strategies. The first overlaps with the Timeline and Process principle. Locate a strategic alliance. In particular this should be a collaborative partner. Determine how the initiative may benefit multiple parties, ultimately finding mutual incentives. Ask questions to learn what is valuable to the other party(s) and remember that the measures of success look different to others, so it is important to learn their concept of success. Build mutual incentives into the project design. This will help the party(s) choose to participate. In consideration of reactance theory (Brehm, J. W., 1966), the process organizational champions employ to foster “buy-in” is extraordinarily intuitively intelligent and effective. Reactance theory explains the phenomenon when people sense a threat to their freedom to choose an action they consequently are motivated to perform the undesired action demonstrating that their free will hasn’t been compromised (Brehm, J.W., 1966). Ultimately, people do not like to feel that their free will is threatened. The organizational champion’s strategy to incentivize the initiative based on others needs to cultivate their desired participation and establish “buy-in” is a sound strategy that moderates the formation of resistance.

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This also helps to mitigate potential conflict, so remain patience and don't push. Practice humility, and acknowledge the contributions of others to celebrate success. One participant shares that she approaches her professional role similar to playing center midfield on the sports field by setting up others to succeed and sometimes that means passing the ball back or to the sides. Playing the organization from the center mid-midfield position means leading from behind and highlighting others achievements regarding the initiative. Building from a collaborative partnership(s) and continuing to create a network of collaboration by developing mutual interests to create buy-in helps to mitigate contrarian voices making project antagonists outliers over time.

The five Strategic Collaboration strategies are:

- Strategic Alliance- Locate a collaborative partner(s); it may be a boss or direct report
- Determine Mutual Incentives and Build into Project Design- Remember the Core Relating principles, and ask: what does the other party(s) need and want?
- Foster Buy-in- Present the opportunity to participate and let others choose to be part of the action
- Practice Humility- Acknowledge and celebrate others contributions, let go of the desire for credit
- Play from the Center- Know that sometimes the best move forward is back or lateral, stay patient

Acknowledging Resistance

The last key principle in the OCCMM is Acknowledging Resistance. Through the implementation of the Strategic Collaboration process, it is important to remain sensitive to resistance. Resistance is a natural occurrence. Understand there are many roads to travel to the destination of an initiative, so embrace the experience as a “road block” or “rut in the road.” Acknowledge it exists. At first glance resistance may be attributed to a colleague(s). However, it is important to comprehend regardless if the resistance arrives via a person or due to a structural consideration within the organization, the colleague(s) is a partner. Think of this

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colleague as the AAA service specialist when stuck in the road, and he/she is there to work together to fix the flat tire and get the initiative back on the road. Embrace this partner to learn and exchange information. Focus on the Core Relating Empathy principle. Engaging in active listening, remaining non-defensive, and recognizing to the partner that you understand the concern may alleviate resistance.

Another crucial feature of Acknowledging Resistance is the ability to employ adaptability. Although the organizational champion may feel a vested interest in moving the initiative forward on a timeline with a specific vision for the result without the willingness to employ adaptability the “road block” may develop into a traffic jam or ultimately an intractable “conflict.” There are a few strategies to employ adaptability in regard to resistance. There may be a need to reframe the conceived ideal vision for a final result. A question to consider that may help with reframing the objective is: What idea (or detail) can be sacrificed that ultimately doesn’t affect the big picture vision? Another adaptability strategy to employ is to remove the colleague(s) obstacles. What is keeping this person(s) from participating or moving forward? What is standing in their way- time or lack of information? What can you provide for that party to eliminate his/her obstacle(s)?

Another feature of adaptability is Leveraging Connections from the Core Relating principles to incite movement. Serve as a bridge to connect individuals that may benefit by exchanging information, or reflect on the relational network to call on support from someone where there is credit in the bank. In Acknowledging Resistance one may learn that it is important to pause and “take a step back.” For example, there may be a need to invest time in more conversations or proceed by removing the other party’s obstacle. Although time consuming, an investment in this fashion is better than plowing or pushing forward at the

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expense of the relationship(s). Although not always desirable, circumventing the resistance is another adaptable strategy. Perhaps, there is a detail or circumstance that truly doesn't affect the scope of the initiative. However, when employing the circumvention strategy, it is important to retain the Core Relating principles, because one does not want others to feel dismissed or unheard. To effectively circumvent a situation, one may need to engage the other party to convey understanding regarding the party(s) concerns- acknowledging what they want to have happen and why. Although one circumvents the investment made in a particular situation, one can still maintain Core Relating values in the rapport with others. Avoid situations, not the people. In addition, consider placing the initiative on the "back-burner." Now may not be a ripe time to continue moving an initiative forward, even after all the work done- especially with incentivizing during the Strategic Collaboration phase. It may not be a priority for leaders, or the organizational need isn't as great as other respective work tasks at the current time. This does not necessarily imply the idea or initiative isn't valuable. By responding to the circumstance by placing the initiative on the back-burner for the time, it is then possible to invest energy in working with others on a different initiative.

This leads to the final Acknowledging Resistance strategy that is a return to Strategic Alliances. Realize if now is not the time, it is possible to adapt by working with collaborative partners on a different initiative.

The Acknowledging Resistance strategies are:

- Accept Resistance- It's natural
- Embrace the Conflict Partner- Invite the partner to share suggestions and concerns, and foster a welcoming environment to work together for a solution
- Practice Empathy- Implement active listening and remain non-defensive
- Employ Adaptability:
 - Reframe the Objective- What can be compromised to meet the end goal?
 - Remove their Obstacles- Make it easy for the conflict partner
 - Leverage Connections- Incite movement by tapping into social capital,

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make connections is applicable

-Take a Step Back- Identify and invest in what is necessary now, don't push

-Circumvent the Situation- Remember to apply Core Relating strategies

-Put it on the Back-Burner- If now is not the time, let the idea simmer

- Return to Strategic Alliance(s)- Reconnect with your collaborative partners
- Build Something Else- Remember Babe Ruth struck out 1,330 times, but he also hit 714 home runs

The OCCMM provides an explicit conflict mitigation model to bring a level of awareness to organizational champions about their inherent strategies, so they may become more efficient. In addition by making their strategies explicit via the OCCMM they will also become aware of the intended consequences such as the potential for group think. The information provides a valuable tangible framework for leaders to champion other champions or mentor individuals. In consideration that bosses play a critical role in the organizational champion's ability to generate an initiative, they should also be informed in regard to the OCCMM. This brings awareness to the importance of their role supporting champions via resources such as time and/or money. Additionally, to best "champion a champion" a boss should not micromanage the individual, because organizational champions need space to navigate the landscape. It also helps managers to understand the intent of employees that exhibit these behaviors. In this fashion, managers may strategically utilize and empower organizational champions to take the lead on projects that may require a level of sensitive finesse due to politics within the system. Lastly, since organizational champions are so savvy regarding blocks in the system or challenging leadership situations it is particularly useful for bosses (particularly executive leadership) to track their movements. When the organizational champion retreats or puts the initiative on the back burner, it may uncover important information regarding a systemic or personnel issue in a department.

Implementation

To make the OCCMM explicit the information can be integrated into employee active leadership and career training human resources courses. However, empowering or expecting everyone within an organization to develop initiatives may lead to unexpected challenges and undesirable results. Therefore, although the OCCMM offers important general principles for navigating an organization in a fashion that mitigates conflict and fosters a collegial core relationship style, not all employees should necessarily implement the information in the form of an unsanctioned interdepartmental initiative. Consequently, developing a mechanism to identify and empower organizational champions already active within the system for targeted initiatives or special training may be most desirable. To identify organizational champions, the researcher suggests developing criteria with quantitative considerations such as number of years' experience within the organization, number of professional roles in different units and/or different roles, and diversity of experience. In addition, after manager and employee training, requesting a nomination and recommendation from managers and colleagues that includes information regarding personality characteristics of an organizational champion as described in this study.

Synchronize Organizational Champions- Collaboration is Contagious

There are two additional possibilities to maximize organizational champions within the organization. Organizational champions may be deployed to strategically foster emergence to spread collaboration and Core Relating values within the organizational culture (Nowak & Vallacher, 1998a). In addition, the ability to synchronize organizational champions' initiatives in a "top-down," "middle-out," and "bottom-up" fashion, may serve as a means to tactically prime the latent attractors for organizational change (Coleman et al., 2007).

Strategically Fostering Collaborative Emergence

Organizational champions exhibit Core Relating values that foster collaborative and mutually beneficial relationships. As previously discussed, emergence is due to self-organization among elements, where each element adjusts to the current state of other elements and the tendency for groups to develop a common psychological state is highly adaptive (Vallacher & Nowak, 2007, Nowak & Vallacher, 1998a). Shared group norms and beliefs often develop through the spontaneous coordination of group members' impulses and actions, without higher level authoritative intervention to impose rules (Durkheim, 1938; Turner & Killian, 1957). Based on observations of public good games, Fowler & Christakis (2010) report that witnessing other people (including strangers) performing cooperative or uncooperative behavior influenced future altruistic and cooperative behavior. Their research indicates that this behavior influences up to three degrees of separation from an individual (Fowler & Christakis, 2010). When thinking about the implications of organizational champions' Core Relating values and their position in the organizational landscape as bridges to various departments, the influence of their behavior has expansive possibilities. People impersonate the behaviors of those around them, and this can cause cooperative behaviors to spread to dozens, or even hundreds, of people in a social network (Fowler & Christakis, 2010). Therefore strategically fostering collaborative emergence by positioning organizational champions on project teams or task forces within the organization will help to foster a latent attractor for collaboration.

Interestingly, Fowler & Christakis (2010) report that cooperation is mostly during contingency with self-interest. Since organizational champions embed others self-interest in the interdepartmental project design via their mutual incentivizing efforts, there is an increased potentiality for spreading their Core Relating values to colleagues within the organization. This

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reiterates the need to identify organizational champions within the organizational landscape and strategically connect them to encourage the contagion of pockets of collaboration.

Implementation

Managers need to know the employees that reflect Core Relating values. This is sometimes difficult if the manager(s) doesn't reflect those values. The implementation of this strategy to some degree is dependent upon the orientation and values of the leader. Leadership that maintains a collaborative vision may empower two (or more) organizational champions to lead an interdepartmental initiative that includes interacting with units that demonstrates isolating tendencies. If a unit is fraught with challenging personalities, the organizational champion should help to determine who they want to join the team; to increase the likelihood of strategic collaborative emergence, more collaborative minded colleagues on the team is desirable to help influence those challenging colleagues. Building a latent attractor in this fashion helps to prime an organization for a culture shift. One cannot mandate collaboration. Since collaboration is contagious strategically placing organizational champions into roles and project teams will help to cultivate the Core Relating interaction style.

Lastly, due to the evidence that three participants demonstrated an unintentional synchronization of interdepartmental initiatives (top-down, middle-out, and bottom-up), the researcher suggests senior executives may intentionally replicate such a strategy to prime an organizational landscape for a leadership change or collaborative culture shift by strategically deploying organizational champions especially at the middle and bottom levels within the organization. This recommendation warrants further exploration and potential research.

Research Implications and Conclusion

Organizational champions share a number of “magic secrets” about how they experience conflict within the development of an interdepartmental initiative in an organization. The main contribution of this investigation is the development of the Organizational Champion Conflict Mitigation Model to transform their implicit frameworks and strategies into an explicit understanding of how organizational champions adeptly navigate the organizational terrain. Organizational champions are relationship gardeners and the Core Relating values embody the essence of how they successfully collaborate with people from various professional levels within an organization. Their intuitive comprehension of human behavior leads them to actively listen for mutual incentives for the purpose of integrating these facets into the project design and presenting others the choice to participate. This strategy mitigates reactance because colleagues free will is not challenged. Ultimately, generating buy-in and enhancing the vested interest on behalf of the other party significantly increases their willingness to participate.

Organizational champions are masters at mitigating conflict, particularly because they view and accept resistance as a natural aspect to the process. It is only a road block. A perceived obstacle. A rut in the road. Just as they embrace colleagues prior to needing them for a specific work related agenda, they embrace them when challenges arise as their “conflict partners.” They practice empathy and employ adaptability in their response strategies. Since organizational champions typically orient their affiliation with a longer range organizational vision, they don’t bulldoze to push their missions forward. They will place an initiative on the backburner before rupturing a relationship and reconvene with collaborative partners.

Due to the organizational champions’ intrinsic relational and conflict mitigation skills, they develop considerable social capital in organizations and typically serve as bridges

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connecting individuals from various departments. These are crucial features to consider especially in organizations that reflect competitive interdepartmental dynamics or operate in silos and lack communication transparency. An exciting component to this current research relates to how managers and senior executives may strategically deploy organizational champions to prime the organization for culture shifts. People impersonate the behaviors of those around them, and this can cause cooperative behaviors to spread to dozens, or even hundreds, of people in a social network (Fowler & Christakis, 2010). Collaboration is contagious, and strategically fostering collaborative emergence by placing organizational champions on task forces or projects to specifically integrate them on teams that exhibit tense or competitive dynamics will likely drastically influence the unit dynamics over time.

In addition, senior executive leadership may wish to synchronize organizational champions initiatives in a top-down, middle-out, and bottom-up approach to prime the landscape for a culture shift such as a leadership change. Although such a synchronization unintentionally occurred in this research, it remains to be seen if the strategy may be replicated. The value of this approach is the ability to transform the landscape by fostering buy-in at the middle and bottom levels within the organization. These strategies are dependent upon the leadership style and vision of executives and key managers. A challenge to sustainability relates to the shifting nature of an organizational network- strategic alliances and key leaders may depart the company. In regard to leadership succession one important feature to maintain continuity in the system is to plan for succession by promoting a strategic alliance that exhibits similar organizational champion leadership aptitudes. This is also why strategically fostering collaborative emergence at the lower professional ranks within the organization is crucial. With organizational champions serving as catalysts to generate and nurture collaborative hubs within the organization, they will

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positively influence the interaction style of colleagues to eventually normalize the collaborative standard of conducting business. Therefore, a leadership change shouldn't entirely rupture the positive intergroup collaborative dynamics between departments.

The most exciting implications of the current research relate to a new framework to apply for approaching undesirable workplace dynamics. Many leaders invest valuable resources- time and money- hiring a plethora of consultants in the attempt to assist specific individuals or managers that may be high performers, but exhibit a challenging relational interaction style. In a sense, the framework applied is a diagnostic approach in an attempt to "fix the cancer." The theoretical hypothesis in such a circumstance is fixing the cancerous growth will heal the intergroup dynamics. However, one may ponder the consequences of the potential productivity loss from taking this diagnostic tactic. Instead, the current research recommends a new approach. Invest in the positive. Invest in what is working. Invest in organizational champions. Spread health throughout the organizational landscape.

Lastly, the promise of the Organizational Champion Conflict Mitigation Model is that it embodies principles that speak to a leadership style imperative in the current global business climate- particularly capitalist enterprises that place great value on financial return on investments. Can embracing a leadership style that promotes OCCMM principles serve to mitigate potential catastrophic organizational events? Organizational champions envision a brighter future, and they embrace today with sensitivity toward individuals and the organizational dynamics in a fashion that enables them to remain present and adaptable in their environments. One is left to speculate what is the return on investment (and potential capital saved due to the mitigation of potential conflicts and catastrophes) for vigorously investing in organizational champions?

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APPENDIX A

The Organizational Champion Conflict Mitigation Model (OCCMM)

Core Relating strategies:

- Small Talk- Collegial chat without an agenda
- Empathy- Ask questions, listen, and learn what is important to the other party
- Intergroup Dynamics Awareness- Do homework on intergroup dynamics
- Leverage Connections- Connect unconnected colleagues and raise social capital

Timeline & Process strategies:

- Organizational Need Identification- Locate an idea, best if can serve multiple parties
- Move Outside of Your Unit- Employ Core Relating principles to learn information about individuals and respective organizational dynamics (comb the landscape for mutual incentives)
- Boss on Board- Champion the boss's support
- Strategic Alliance- Find a partner(s) interested in the initiative; it can be a boss or direct report
- Know the System and Be Patient- Recognize a personal timeline is not one that others or the organizations adheres to, so be patient and flexible

Strategic Collaboration strategies:

- Strategic Alliance- Locate a collaborative partner(s); it may be a boss or direct report
- Determine Mutual Incentives and Build into Project Design- Remember the Core Relating principles, and ask: what does the other party(s) need and want?
- Foster Buy-in- Present the opportunity to participate and let others choose to be part of the action
- Practice Humility- Acknowledge and celebrate others contributions, let go of the desire for credit
- Play from the Center- Know that sometimes the best move forward is back or lateral, stay patient

Acknowledging Resistance strategies:

- Accept Resistance- It's natural
- Embrace the Conflict Partner- Invite the partner to share suggestions and concerns, and foster a welcoming environment to work together for a solution
- Practice Empathy- Implement active listening and remain non-defensive
- Employ Adaptability:
 - Reframe the Objective- What can be compromised to meet the end goal?
 - Remove their Obstacles- Make it easy for the conflict partner
 - Leverage Connections- Incite movement by tapping into social capital, make connections is applicable
 - Take a Step Back- Identify and invest in what is necessary now, don't push
 - Circumvent the Situation- Remember to apply Core Relating strategies
 - Put it on the Back-Burner- If now is not the time, let the idea simmer
- Return to Strategic Alliance(s)- Reconnect with your collaborative partners
- Build Something Else- Remember Babe Ruth struck out 1,330 times, but he also hit 714 home runs

