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## **GUEST EDITORIAL WORKPLACE CONFLICT STRATEGIES: CONFLICT COACHING VERSUS MEDIATION**

**Taylor Carden**

### **Abstract**

Conflict is a regularly occurring component of professional settings; any given workplace will experience conflict daily, and a well-equipped manager or dispute resolution system can help with managing conflict cycles. Two options for long-term conflict management within an organization are conflict coaching and an institutional mediation process. While both methods for managing conflict have their values, they also have their shortcomings. Conflict coaching, which trains leaders to manage conflict through integrative training and follow-up, is more effective for empowering leaders to manage conflict within the organization and on many different levels of the organizational hierarchy, while mediation, which relies on a balance of power and a dialogue-focused setting, is more effective for individuals on the same level of the organizational power hierarchy to come to their own solution through the help of a mediator.

### **Introduction**

Wilmot and Hocker (2011) define mediation as a conflict resolution method in which a mediator assists two parties in reaching a solution or agreement: the mediator “is to facilitate the parties to the dispute to reach an agreement themselves.” Additionally, the mediator serves as a “listener, suggestion-giver, the formulator of final agreements to which both sides have contributed” (Wilmot & Hocker, p. 279).

In other words, the mediator is not in charge of necessarily providing the solution. Instead, the mediator assists with creating an environment in which the conflicting parties can determine a solution themselves. Mediators are more of a supportive crutch in the solution-seeking process; they can help establish ground rules, encourage open dialogue, and ask questions to guide the parties to seek solution options. They are also caretakers to the relationship, and help the parties repair or continue a relationship, whether professional or personal (Raines, 2013).

### **Mediation**

Mediation has its advantages in the workplace in regards to parties that serve on the same level of organizational hierarchy, because mediation allows for both parties’ concerns and motives to come forward for consideration, heard and addressed in an equal manner; both sides are considered because both parties have the opportunity to speak for themselves (Hermann, 2012). Indeed, one of the biggest downsides to mediation is when an imbalance of power occurs, so that one side is less likely to defend themselves fully or participate with the gusto and authority of the other party involved. For example, mediation is often a poor choice for women in abusive

relationships, because qualitative evidence points to a lack of self-defense in a mediation situation because of the lack of power the abused feels, even in an environment when they are given the opportunity to represent their needs under the supervision of a mediator (Vestal, 2007). Because power imbalances can taint an otherwise participatory and satisfactory method of conflict resolution, leaders must carefully examine the power of a given party before proceeding with mediation. When both sides are on the same level of power or similar levels of power, then mediation can succeed in creating a fair process that allows both parties to have a say in the outcome.

Another advantage to mediation is its ability to appropriately handle highly emotional situations. This advantage is due largely in part because mediation allows both parties to speak for themselves, so their concerns and motives are validated by their own perspectives; it largely eliminates the risk of a third party speaking for them and misconstruing their intentions (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011). McKenzie (2012) writes that mediation has increased in popularity in several facets of the workforce because of its ability to meet the needs of emotionally charged situations: “considered to be effective in disputes involving strong emotions, mediation is increasingly popular as a means to resolve discrimination and harassment complaints.” Additionally, McKenzie (2012) found in a study centered on psychological injury claims that an organization’s mediation success revolves around having a concrete system in place that is implemented business-wide; there must be a broad commitment to creating a system and that is supported by all involved:

“The process of mediation has the potential to be an effective method of resolving psychological injury claims due to workplace relationship breakdown, especially when supported by organizational commitment to Alternative Dispute Resolution strategies, policies and processes, and conducted by independent, skilled mediators. However, since there is a lack of literature on mediation in the occupational rehabilitation and return to work contexts, it is recommended that further research be undertaken.”

### **Conflict Coaching**

However, in settings where emotions are not necessarily a critical component of the outcome, mediation again sees a disadvantage: more process-driven conflicts or conflicts that require upper-level decision making within a hierarchy may be better suited for a process that champions building the skills of leadership. This is where conflict coaching comes into play as a better method within a business structure.

“Conflict coaching involves a coach working with a client to improve the client’s conflict understanding, interaction strategies, and/or interactions skills” (Brinkert, 2011). While conflict coaching can involve clients of all levels of an organization’s hierarchy, it often occurs on a managerial level because managers often handle conflict from a multi-level perspective. Additionally, there is a branch of conflict coaching called executive conflict coaching, which serves as a form of professional development in a one-on-one setting for organizational management (Jones & Brinkert, 2008). Conflict coaching centers around the growth of an individual within a business structure, so that they may better identify conflict styles, strategize conflict managing solutions, engage in negotiations, and confidently manage conflict outcomes through the support of a conflict coach (Grant & Stober, 2006).

A benefit of conflict coaching is that its long-term impact can include a manager's continued development in conflict leadership; they are learning from a coach and long after the coaching ends, they can continue to apply the conflict concepts to both large-scale and small-scale business engagements. In a study of the benefits of conflict coaching within a hospital setting, Brinkert (2011) found that there was strong evidence to support the success of conflict management in process-based conflicts:

“Benefits included supervisor conflict coaching competency and enhanced conflict communication competency for nurse managers and supervisees facing specific conflict situations. Challenges included the management of programme tensions.”

However, the shortcoming of conflict coaching is that it does not always succeed in the more emotional aspects, as Brinkert (2011) found with ongoing tensions in the nursing leadership study, particularly in the more difficult areas that nurses often face such as mortality and morbidity (Brinkert p. 84). Conflict coaching does strive, however, to follow a pattern that allows them to get the root of a given conflict, such as the Comprehensive Conflict Coaching Model, or CCC Model. The CCC Model's design focuses on uncovering and examining the narrative, and emphasizes improving communication (Jones & Brinkert, 2008). In fact, Brinkert (2011) noted the importance of the CCC Model within the nursing study, and wrote about the impact of uncovering the story because it allowed the nurse managers to better identify and handle conflict within the hospital. The nurse managers participated in 12 hours of conflict coaching followed by follow-up sessions, and found success with handling conflict both during and after receiving coaching compared to before the coaching sessions:

“Many attributed their success to the use of one or more effective strategies and skills such as demonstrating respect, listening effectively and knowing when to engage. It was not uncommon for nurse managers to express reasonable comfort and success in dealing with conflict but to also note that there were certainly aspects of conflict that were outside of their control” (Brinkert, p. 85).

Clearly, conflict coaching succeeds in developing the conflict skills of clients, and gives them the tools necessary to engage in daily workplace conflict. Its greatest triumph in this case was arguably its ability to allow the nurse managers to implement specific coaching-related tools through ongoing learning sessions and one-on-one coaching.

### **Mediation Versus Conflict Coaching**

The biggest difference between mediation and conflict coaching remains that where conflict coaching develops an individual with the tools to face current and future conflicts by equipping the individual with strategies and skills in a learning environment, mediation allows two parties to work out their own solution through dialogue facilitated by a trained mediator. Where mediation succeeds with allowing both parties to express themselves, conflict coaching can sometimes fail because discovering the story is ultimately in the hands of the client as they work to piece together a conflict puzzle on their own. Where conflict coaching succeeds in equipping a leader with the tools to reach a solution determined by their best effort and use of conflict tools, mediation sometimes fails to provide a solution, or to occur at all, because at least one, if not

both parties, may be unwilling to even engage in mediation or are ill-equipped to do so because of power imbalances (Herrmann, 2012). In either case, however, both mediators and coaches need training and experience to facilitate either coaching or mediation, because ill-equipped leaders can sometimes guide a conflict to a “quick fix,” which, while sometimes appropriate, does not often lead to a fully resolved conflict because the root was not found (Copeland & Wida, 1996). Both mediation and conflict coaching can lead to finding the root of the conflict, and indeed, both should strive to if implemented correctly, but mediation seeks to let the parties themselves find the root while conflict coaching is a system of training that allows the client to learn to find the root through communication and narrative.

It is important to recognize as well that conflict coaching and mediation are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed, a conflict coach may train their client in the art of mediation as a strategy or tool for particular disputes within an organization: “conflict coaching may be used to help parties in preparing for mediation or a rights-based process” (Herrmann, p. 45). Additionally, it would not be a detriment to an organization to implement both, as both conflict coaching and mediation has distinct benefits. However, based on the benefits and downfalls of both conflict strategies, conflict coaching is a better choice for developing individual business leaders so that they may confidently manage conflict on a variety of organizational levels. Mediation, with its focus on individuals working with each other in cooperative solution seeking and dialogue centered around emotion and motive, is a better strategy for individuals that fall on the same, or *closely*-related, level of an organizational hierarchy, as power imbalances are mediation’s downfall.

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## **CROSSING A RAGING RIVER ON A SHAKY BRANCH: CHECHEN WOMEN REFUGEES IN THE UNITED STATES**

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### **Abstract**

The Chechen War was a brutal conflict that has created, by some estimates, more than half a million refugees worldwide. An important goal in this research was to understand the life story and the lived experience of eight Chechen women refugees who survived the war in Chechnya. A descriptive phenomenological process coupled with a critical feminist approach were used in this interpretive study. The experiences of Chechen refugees, and especially Chechen women, have often been neglected in research on the war. When their experiences have been considered, Chechen women have been conceived of primarily as either helpless victims with little or no agency or as fanatical suicide bombers inspired by radical Islam, or both. Through rich descriptions, these participants unveiled the extent to which they were generative (concerned for the future and future generations). Generativity has been positively associated with well-being as well as social and political engagement. Interviewees revealed experiences of loss and anxiety during the war, and of struggling to survive. Once they arrived in the United States, participant experiences included economic hardship and cultural dislocation. Alongside these experiences, the women also experienced resistance, resilience, and generativity. The following nine major themes emerged from participants' phenomenological life stories: Losses, War Trauma, Resistance, and Resilience, Struggling to Create a New Life, Faith, Gender, Ethnicity, and Generativity. Analysis of the narratives revealed similarities between Generativity and the themes of Faith and Ethnicity. This study presents an *Integrative Interpretive Framework* for understanding the lived experience of Chechen women.

### **Introduction**

War has devastating impacts to society, thus learning from the lessons of war is critical to helping create a better future. Since the mid-1980s, academics such as Tickner (1992), Elshtain (1995), and Enloe (2000) have called attention to the importance of gender in peace and conflict studies. This increased attention has led to several studies of women's diverse experiences during and after war (Altinay, 2004; Cockburn, 1999; Giles, 2003; Goździak, 2009; Machanda, 2001; Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004). Central to the importance of "gendered" war and peace studies is the study of effects of war, which undeniably involves large numbers of civilians, including women and girls (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004). This study reveals the meaning-making and significant realities of a group of Chechen refugees who has experienced violence and war firsthand. Today, there are nearly twenty million refugees in the world (UNHCR, 2017); so

investigating the plight, realities, and struggles of refugees is more important than ever to help foster improved responses and interventions by all who are involved in this crisis. The purpose of this research is to improve our understanding and further our discovery regarding these fragile populations, so that individuals, agencies, and organizations can learn about refugee challenges from the perspective of the refugees themselves. We often don't hear refugees' stories from their own perspectives; and this study addresses this knowledge gap by giving voice to the refugees who shared their stories and realities

## **Chechen War and Chechen Refugees**

The Chechen War (1992-2002) was an example of a brutal conflict that epitomized Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben's (2005) conception of a "state of exception," in which a constant state of suspension of law and rights turns human beings into mere "bare life" that can be killed with impunity. Freedom House (2006) reported that an estimated 200,000 Chechen civilians died as a result of the war, while an estimated 20,000 Russian soldiers died (Levin, 2006). Because of the horrific conditions in Chechnya, much of the population has fled. Between 400,000 and 600,000 people were displaced as a result of the 1994-1996 war, and another 600,000 during the period from 1999-2003 (Nichols, 2000). Even today, the refugee crisis continues, with between 400 and 800 mostly Chechen asylum seekers a day attempted to cross the Belarus-Poland border during the summer months of 2016 (Gorbunova, 2017). The "bare life" experiences of Chechen refugees have often been neglected in research on the conflict. This is especially true in the case of Chechen women. When their experiences *have* been considered, Chechen women have been conceived of primarily as either helpless victims with little or no agency or as fanatical suicide bombers inspired by radical Islam, or both (Speckhard, Tarabrina, Krasnov, & Mufel, 2005).

Much of the available research on refugees, including Chechen women has been psychiatric and based on a PTSD or trauma model, rather than being grounded in a conflict analysis model. These psychiatric data see women primarily as traumatized victims without considering their lived realities and their unique worldviews. It has been argued by many researchers that Western psychology is not well-suited to serving refugees, partly as a result of its lack of regard for cultural differences (Goździak, 2009). It is our hope that the current study gives readers an authentic glimpse into the realities of refugees as they share their perspectives in relation to where they are and where they are coming from. It is our hope that progress can be made in how individuals, agencies, organizations, countries and even leaders approach and perceive refugees.

Redressing the limitations of the trauma model with refugees has led to the current study and its focus on a phenomenological framework to (1) understand these Chechen women refugees' realities, (2) facilitate in refugee assistance as a means to enhance cultural competence (Ahearn, 2000) (3) and to discover the needs of these unique group of women refugees as a means to improve how individuals, humanitarian agencies and/or organizations, as well as leaders and countries respond to the needs of refugees.

## **Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

This was a critical feminist qualitative study, utilizing a phenomenological approach. By emphasizing "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) through such tools as narrative interviews, qualitative methods are able to help illuminate the multiple realities of refugee experiences.

Communication interaction is often seen as a struggle between marginalized groups and those of more dominant control. To come to understand the human condition, critical feminists believe it is important to study the lived experience of the people in their contexts and bring their struggles to the surface, with the ultimate goal to promote change and improve the human condition.

The goal of critical theory is to come to an awareness of power and its constraints on communication and interaction in a way to demolish it, so to have a more equal status among members in a society. The assumption is that people who become aware of the oppressive sources in society will actively resist them to acquire equity. Critical feminist theory highlights women's unique issues by giving voice to women's experience, providing insights into their realities, and making their concerns visible (Ribbens & Edwards, 1998). This study sought to accomplish these ends for the women interviewed.

Phenomenology seeks to consider human experience from a perspective that is as free of the researcher's cultural heritage as possible, and to find the "essence, structure, or form of human experience and human behavior as revealed through essentially descriptive techniques including disciplined reflection" (Valle & King, 1978, p. 10). In the interpretivist approach, the researcher is interested in localized groups and not universal generalizations—it is an emic approach. Phenomenology suggests that individuals create meaning through experience and realities are revealed through sharing perspectives.

## **Background on Chechnya and Chechens**

Chechens have been in the North Caucasus since at least the seventh century (Derluguian, 2005). A series of brutal Soviet collectivization movements by Communist Party officials, including deportations carried out with horrific levels of violence, led to the establishment of a national memory that mobilized the Chechens to fight against the Russians when the Soviet Union collapsed. The resulting years of war started in 1992 (Johnston, 2008). Chechen history has also been shaped by its relationship to Islam. Chechnya is predominantly Muslim, dominated by Sufism, the mystical form of Islam that rejects sharia law in favor of societal law. Sufism encourages independent, individual relationships with God, and as such fits in well with Chechen society's anti-hierarchical, individualist, and egalitarian nature, which helps explain its appeal to Chechens and its lasting effect on the Chechen people, especially the women interviewed for this study.

To understand women's refugee experience it is important to understand the position that women occupied in society before, during, and after the war (Palmary, 2005). Women's traditional role in Chechen culture is proscribed by traditional Chechen values and cultural norms. Although women participate in the public sphere, femininity is primarily associated with the roles of wife and mother. Preserving women's (and thereby family) honor often resulted, before the war, in attempts to exclude women from the public sphere, with controls placed on women's public behavior. This idea of femininity positions women in the essentialized role of biological reproducers (Anthias, Yuval-Davis, & Cain, 1992). During the war, however, many women had to become the sole breadwinners in the family because they were perceived as less of a threat in public life, so they were able to move about more freely in public spaces, in contrast to Chechen men, who often risked their lives by simply stepping out the front door of their homes. (Conley, 2004; Szczepanikova, 2015). The result is that women went from being primarily associated with domesticity (even when they were also working), to being primarily in

the public realm, supporting themselves and their families.

### **The Chechen War and Its Effects**

Over a decade of war left Chechnya devastated. Since 2002, when Russia's FSB, or state security bureau, took over in Chechnya, the Russian government has been referring to the situation in Chechnya as "normalized". These normalizations were part of the Russian policy of "Chechenization", a process by which a Chechen-led, Russian-backed administration was installed and many Russian soldiers left Chechnya. However, throughout this period, battles between rebels and the remaining soldiers occurred, as well as extreme human rights abuses. Despite increased stability in the region, arbitrary detention, torture, disappearances, and kidnapping continued with no consequences for those who carry them out (United Nations, 2009).

In the Chechen "state of exception", indiscriminate violence and unaccountability created a state of terror and destruction that is almost incomprehensible. The women who arrived in the US as refugees had experienced the ultimate 'bare life'— the loss of everything: home, community, culture, and basic dignity. Chechen women were traumatized, raped, and killed with impunity during the war (Speckhard, et al., 2005). Women lost relatives and were targeted for interrogation, torture, and disappearances by the military. The increase in women suicide bombers led to a government policy of full-body searches on all Chechen women, a particularly humiliating experience for Muslim women to endure (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006).

### **Research Implications**

Recent work in psychology and healthcare have set a precedent for the kind of study conducted here. Many recent studies have begun to look at refugee women in a broader context, taking into account gender, political elements, and cultural and class identity (Adams, Gardiner & Assefi, 2004; Guruge & Khanlou, 2004; Whittaker, Hardy, Lewis, & Buchan, 2005). Some of these studies have utilized semi-structured and life story interviewing. This supports the decision to use the Life Story Method in this study.

Working from a sociological perspective, Sideris (2003) described how Mozambican women in her research viewed their experience of war and exile as depriving them of their sense of cultural and social belonging. Eisenbruch (1991) also noted that the refugees he worked with felt both social loss and nostalgia as a result of the emphasis on integration in their host countries. He calls this sense of loss "cultural bereavement" (Eisenbruch, 1991). Bracken, Giller, & Summerfield (1995), in their work on Uganda, noted how political and social realities structured the meanings people attributed to their experiences and traumas, and the ways in which these traumas and their effects were reported. These realities also affected the support available and the therapies considered appropriate. Significantly, while cultural bereavement and loss of sense of purpose were themes expected to be found in the Chechen women interviewed, these themes were largely absent. Although the women interviewed were nostalgic, they were also determined and confident about maintaining and transmitting their culture.

Goździak (2009), in a study of Kosovar women at Fort Dix, found the women framed their experiences in political and religious contexts. She argued that Kosovar women's self-identities were much more related to being spouses and siblings of Kosovar Liberation Army (KLA)

soldiers, or to having been dissidents, than to what they were seen as by their Western mental health care providers (traumatized victims). Pavlish (2005) used narrative interviews of 14 Congolese women to identify six action responses: refiguration, advocacy, resistance, resignation, sorrow, and faith. Heeding the call to include women's experiences in studies of war and peace, this study sought to explore the factors that sustained the women and helped them survive with hope for the future. Keyes & Ryff (1998) found, for example, in study of over 2000 Americans, that well-being was connected to generative concern for the next generation, emotional support for the young, and seeing the self as generative. With these thoughts on personal and cultural efficacy in mind, the researchers turned toward qualitative methods.

## Method

### Participants

Purposive and convenience sampling was utilized to select women for the study based on relevant experience. Trusted Chechen women as well as trusted aid workers were used to locate participants. Because phenomenology is concerned with getting extensive information from a small sample, rather than more limited data from a large sample (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), a limited number of participants were recruited: eight Chechen women. These women ranged in age from twenty-four to fifty-three, were refugees, and had survived the war in Chechnya. They all were located in the U.S. during the time of the interviews. These women qualified as an excellent sample given the in-depth approach of phenomenology. Blumer (1969) argued that "seeking participants...who are acute observers and who are well informed...A small number of such individuals brought together as a discussion and resource group, is more valuable many times over than any representative sample" (p.41). Unlike surveys that often provide a snapshot view, phenomenology allows participants to provide in depth rich descriptions into the phenomenon. Table 1 below provides an overview of the participants

Table 1: Participant Characteristics

Name	Age	Marital status	Children	Education level
Amina	24	Single	0	Some university
Nuura	24	Single	0	Some university
Zeyna	29	Divorced	0	University graduate
Farema	30	Single	0	University graduate
Laila	31	Married	3	High school
Ifoda	38	Divorced	2	Some university
Dagmara	40	Married	3	High school
Kurbika	53	Married	3	Master's in Education

## **Processes**

In this study, phenomenological interviews were designed to gather the critical data that illuminated the lived experiences of Chechen women refugee war survivors. The Life Story Method, advocated by Atkinson (1998), Rosenthal (1993), and Chaitin (2002) was used to collect information, and the approach developed by Moustakas (1994) was used to guide the analyses of data. The thematic open-ended questionnaire utilized by the first author who served as the interviewer was general and allowed latitude on any topic participants desired: "Please tell me your life story; whatever you think is relevant". Given the freedom to choose their own topics for discussion, all participants chose primarily to describe their experiences of the war and their current daily challenges.

Stage one in the study involved collecting basic biographical and demographic information such as age, education, and marital status. This was supplemental information to the main phenomenological study.

## **Member Checks and Double Coders**

As part of the phenomenological process and feminist commitment of this project, bracketing was practiced throughout the interview phase as to avoid assumptions and prevent bias from entering into the analysis. Furthermore, collaboration was used through member check-ins with the participants by allowing them to confirm accurate meanings and the second author of this current study served as a double-coder of the data and advisor to ensure trustworthiness by confirming the accuracy of placement of items in the categories referenced in this current study. The data was analyzed utilizing Moustakas' (1994) approach, which involves eight distinct steps that lead toward a composite description of the essence of the experiences described by the participant. The thematic elements are described in the findings below.

## **Data Analysis and Presentation**

The data analyses included a composite description of the interview responses using the method developed by Moustakas (1994) and a thematic analysis of the findings upon completion of that process. The eight steps of the process are described below.

### **Step 1: Horizontalizing, reduction and elimination**

The first step in Moustakas' (1994) approach to phenomenological data reduction involves treating every expression of the participant as a relevant, important statement. By weighing these statements as equal, between 75-150 "horizons" were discovered per interview.

### **Step 2: Reduction and elimination**

Through the process of reduction, horizontal statements were organized into those that met the following requirements: (a) Does the statement contain information essential to understanding the experience; and (b) Can the researcher abstract and label the statement (Moustakas, 1994). This process resulted in a series of individual, non-repetitive statements.

### **Step 3: Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents**

In this step, invariant constituents that resulted from the process of reduction and elimination were taken and grouped into similar themes through careful scrutiny of the invariant constituents. The following are examples of three of the themes identified from one participant's interviews with invariant constituents grouped underneath:

#### Theme 1: Loss of pre-war life

- Childhood life was happy/ I felt personal freedom and support from family.
- Life as child was no different from other children's lives.
- My family and I felt safe before war.

#### Theme 2: Loss of home, possessions, and physical structures

- My city was destroyed and it changed life forever.
- It was not safe to go outside and much of life was lived hiding.
- Dreams become impractical.

#### Theme 3: Torture, violent death, sense of incomprehension

- It was not a supportive environment to share sad or fearful feelings.
- Men were taken from families and killed.
- Family members were carelessly killed or taken.

Such themes formed the groundwork for the descriptive writing that followed in the remainder of Moustakas' (1994) method. While the themes above were derived from just one interview with one participant, each of these themes (as well as others) were reflected in the composite description of the eight participants as a group.

### **Step 4: Final identification of the invariant constituents and themes**

In this phase the invariant constituents and themes were analyzed against the original participant transcript to ensure that resulting themes were explicitly expressed or were compatible. Any themes that were neither expressed nor compatible were deleted (Moustakas, 1994). The textural themes that began to emerge in this process were, for example, losses, war trauma, and struggling to create a new life.

### **Step 5: Construction of an individual textural description of experiences**

In this stage, individual textural description of the experience that included a number of verbatim examples were generated.

### **Step 6: Construction of individual structural descriptions of experiences**

The next step involved the creation of an individual structural description of the experience. This description "provides a vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 135). While the textural description describes "what" happened, the

structural description describes “how” the participant experiences the phenomenon.

### **Step 7: Construction of textural-structural descriptions of experiences**

This description includes both the “what” of the textural description with the “how” of the structural description. It incorporates the invariant constituents and themes of the earlier phases of the data analysis.

### **Step 8: Construction of a composite description of experiences**

The final step of Moustakas’ (1994) approach to phenomenological data analysis is the construction of a composite description of the experiences of all eight of the research participants. This final description includes only the themes that all eight participants in the case study had in common and focuses on the essences and meanings of the participants’ shared, lived experiences of the phenomenon.

### **Group composite themes of participants**

The overarching composite description that best captured the reality of the majority of the women, based on Step 8 of the Moustakas approach, can best be summarized and captured by this participant’s narrative as follows:

“Chechnya was a great country where we all felt free. I never believed the war would happen. It was an unbelievable experience. My beautiful city was destroyed and my life changed forever. I lost people who were important to me and was challenged on a daily basis to survive and to keep my sanity through all the war atrocities. Destruction became normal and I questioned my previous goals and dreams. I had to make changes in those goals to suit my situation and support myself and/or my family. I was either discouraged from sharing my feelings and/or felt it inappropriate to show sadness. I also had examples around me of strong women and a people who cherished their heritage and faith. Without my ethnic pride and faith, I might not have survived. I had to leave my country as a survival tactic. I had to be resourceful and find my way to stay and work in the United States. Now it is extremely important that I continue in my faith and pass on my Chechen roots. I hope one day to return to my country.”

### **Themes**

Nine major themes emerged from the women’s life stories: losses, war trauma, struggling to create a new life, resistance, resilience, gender, ethnicity, faith, and generativity, which appeared to be correlated to the identity themes of faith, ethnicity, and gender. Within these major themes, the interviewees revealed experiences of loss and of living in extreme fear and anxiety during the war, of struggling to survive, and of fearing for their lives and the lives of their loved ones. Crucial experiences for participants once they arrived in the United States were economic hardship, lack of support, posttraumatic stress, and longing for home. However, alongside these experiences the women also manifested resilience and generativity stemming from their survival.

**Theme 1: Losses**

As Amina, (24 years old, single), put it, “The war broke our lives”. As a group, the women spent very little time discussing their lives before the war, yet for all but one, Ifoda (38 years old, divorced mother of two) it was seen as an idyllic time. For Ifoda, there was “no life before the war. The war was my life.” In regard to her felt experience of the loss of humanity Farema (30 years old, single) stated the following:

People are still disappearing, right now, still. Human rights are not protected at all; a human life is worth nothing, still. Your word doesn't count at all, you just submit to tyrants, dictators. I think today human dignity and self-esteem have fallen down so low. You cannot express yourself easily today. It's very scary, because people are losing their moral values.

**Theme 2: War trauma**

For the women interviewed, the Chechen war experience was one that exposed them to extreme violence, uncertainty, and cruelty. Violence was random and inexplicable. Specifically, they experienced living in fear of rape and violence, the threat of cleansings and disappearances, and the incomprehensibility of war. Such chaos took a heavy toll on the way participants viewed their own safety and the safety of their loved ones. In recounting her experience of the war and its impact on her psyche, Nuura (24, single) stated the following:

It was very common at the time, that at night somebody would come knocking on your door; you could open the door and be seized. Your family would not be able to find you—dead or alive. They would not have any idea where you were taken. There were many cases like that, thousands and thousands. Some people in masks came to your house and took your relatives. You wouldn't know either it's Chechens or Russians. You just cannot find your father, your brother, or mother. When I was fifteen or sixteen years old, I realized that I hadn't heard of anybody who died naturally.

**Theme 3: Resistance (Preferring not to)**

Like Melville's (1980) *Bartleby the Scrivener*, the women engaged in everyday acts of resistance by simply “preferring not to” participate. Many of the women interviewed resisted by insisting on the importance of how they looked. From a western feminist perspective this may seem counterintuitive, but for these women, their identity as women involved beauty and caring for themselves, and not allowing that beauty and self-care to be taken from them was one way they fought back. As Farema argued:

It was our weapon, we were resisting. And it was making lots of people angry. When the soldiers came, they saw it and they were always saying, “You live in basements, but dress as queens!” Of course, it was irritating them; they are stealing everything from you, but you cannot be broken.

**Theme 4: Resilience**

Some of the major sources of resilience for the participants were family and social support. Dagmaara (40 years old, married, mother of three) stated this perspective bluntly:

I will explain... if I want to kill myself, I just imagine my husband and children and how they will feel. So, you make yourself move on, your family makes you do that. And it helps you to live, despite all these wars.

Work and education were also significant sources of resilience and coping, helping the women to see themselves not just as war victims but as people who had the capacity to learn and effect change. Ifoda tells of her experience working with the wounded during the war:

Every time I visited these people, every story would leave a trace in my heart. I couldn't stay indifferent listening to their stories. I considered it my responsibility to those people: to do something in order to change the situation for the better. It keeps me going.

**Theme 5: The struggle to create a new life**

As refugees before and after arrival in the United States, the women in the survey experienced a great deal of stress around practical issues of language, work, and money. Cultural dislocation was also a prominent theme in their struggle to create a new life. Kurbika (53 years old, married, mother of three) spoke of the difficulties of establishing a new life in a new setting, even under the best of circumstances:

People here are very kind to us, but it isn't home. I can't speak the language or go on the street. I work at a store, bagging things, just to get out, but I was a teacher in my country. I'm not complaining. I'm glad I'm safe, my family is safe, but it is strange.

**Theme 6: Gender**

Many of the Chechen women refugees arriving in the US see positive aspects to their traditional roles in Chechen society and wish to preserve those aspects in their present life. However, they recognize (especially the young and unmarried women), the burden that traditional Chechen values can and have placed on their past and present lives. As a function of ethnicity, the women understood themselves to be bearers of culture, and saw many cultural mores and even restrictions as signs of their superior culture.

Dagmaara said, "A woman should be a good mother, a good wife. She should be clean, be faithful to her husband, not like what's normal here. It's just everything is a little more strict. There were a lot of limits." Zeyna also spoke of the sense of responsibility she has as a woman regarding moral behavior: "Women in our culture are more under control than men. In everything. In behavior, in words, in actions. There is more responsibility on the women. We are proud of this responsibility." This feeling regarding gender was not universal, however. Some women felt their gender had kept them from doing more or different things with their life. They were troubled by the restrictions placed on them by society.

**Theme 7: Ethnic identity**

Chechen traditions and cultural values were seen as critical to the women's sense of themselves and as imperatives to be passed on to future generations. The women viewed themselves as keepers of the culture. Respect for elders, responsibility, and following societal rules were all seen as essential elements of Chechen-ness that needed to be handed down. In this sense, it was highly correlated with generativity. Dagmara makes this connection in the following statement:

I love my people very much, I love this culture dearly. I admire many things in my culture and my nation, even in the way of life of my ancestors, their philosophy, how strong and wise they were. How reserved they were. They would never fight or take a weapon for no reason. I want my children to know this. As a woman, I have the most important role in preserving it.

Ethnicity was also viewed as problematic in terms of how the women were perceived and treated by the outer world, but not in terms of how the women viewed themselves. Most of the women spoke of the difficulties they faced when confronting the prejudices of the Russians. Some spoke of the acceptance they feel among Americans without regard to ethnicity. Only one, Nuura, also found herself questioning Chechens as a group, "When I was still living in Russia, in Chechnya – I sometimes didn't get on well with my people, with Chechens. Now I would probably have even less contact.

**Theme 8: Faith**

Despite larger concerns about Islam and politics, all the women identified their faith as among the most important factors in their resilience, survival, and generativity. They adhere to the Sufism that most Chechens practice. And all agreed that the great majority of Chechens are not sympathetic to Islamic fundamentalism, but they fear for their country now that the current government has begun imposing Sharia law. Dagmara gave voice to a common feeling among the participants, as follows:

It is Islam that helped me. Belief in God helped me, it made me stay alive until today. I know that God has created a lot of things, I know it was my fate and only God can help me. It played a very big role. I pray five times a day... If I didn't believe in God, I would have hung myself. If I hadn't known that it is a crime, I would have done so many silly things.

**Theme 9: Generativity**

As individuals, the women all had unique personalities, some sounding more positive than others, yet all spoke of hope, of giving back, of a responsibility toward the future. The common threads in all their generative assertions were a hope of return, ethnic pride, and faith. Despite the fact that return was highly unlikely for most of the women, love for their country and the hope of return kept all the women looking toward the future, both of their countries and themselves, wanting to transmit the best of their country to their children, or in the case of those without

children, wanting to transmit the best of themselves to their county. Zeyna (29 years old, divorced) stated this clearly

I really want to go back home and be a part of our government. Because I want to be capable of changing something for the better, to make changes and do what I consider to be important not only for myself, but what also will be a contribution for my republic, which I love dearly despite everything. I think every person has to do something not only for their family, but also for their people.

In terms of passing the Chechen culture along to their children, the women were universal in the notion that no matter what paths their lives take they should make that effort. Further, the women indicated a strong need to continue to regenerate themselves in their own self-perceived ethnic and faith identities. Zeyna speaks to this in a way that is reflective of the opinions surveyed:

There is always a risk for small nations to dissolve among other big nations. As we have such a beautiful culture, such beautiful and wise laws, I think it is just a crime to forget things and disappear in somebody else's culture. I think we should take all the best from other cultures, but never forget our own.

### **Discussion and Implications of the Study**

This critical feminist, phenomenological study, utilized life story research to investigate the lived experience of Chechen women refugee war survivors. The following nine major themes emerged from the women's life stories: Losses, War Trauma, and Resistance, Resilience, Struggling to Create a New Life, Faith, Gender, Ethnicity, and Generativity.

In this study, one can see the women's agency through some of the major themes uncovered in the research: Preferring Not To, Resilience, Ethnic Pride, Faith, and Generativity. These themes all went alongside the themes of losses and terror that could, and do lead to trauma, despair and passivity. But the women found ways to assert their agency and hold on to their values in the midst of all their suffering.

#### **Preferring Not To**

For these women, their acts of "preferring not to" included asserting their femininity, feeding starving Russian soldiers, continuing to fight for work and education, and challenging Russian soldiers' against tremendous odds in the middle of a massacre. "You are having your war", they seemed to be saying, "but we will not be a part of it". These moments were an expression of resistance to dehumanization and objectification, and an assertion of agency and humanity. They will not be afraid of the future because of what happened in the past.

#### **Resilience**

Some recent contributions include a study of resilience in survivors of the Khmer Rouge (Overland, 2011) and a study of Afghani women refugees' coping strategies (Welsh & Brodsky,

2010). In general, studies of this kind have focused on refugees' narratives of resilience. The current research project identified the resilience of Chechen women and joins the challenge to the normative emphasis on war trauma by adding information on their resilience.

### **Ethnicity**

In direct opposition to writers like Tishkov (2004), who argued that Chechen identity is primarily a byproduct of war, the women interviewed all identified strongly as both Chechen and Muslim. They pointed to language and cultural practices as being fundamental to who they were. Islam was a part, but not all, of that ethnic identity. As women, whether they had children or not, they all saw themselves as responsible for carrying on the cultural and religious teachings of previous generations and transmitting them to future generations.

### **Islam**

Religion is cited as a common source of support for many refugee groups. (Halcon et al., 2004; Jones, Zhang, & Meleis, 2003). Faith in Islam was viewed by the women as a critical mainstay and support and was a dominant theme in their life stories. This is in contrast to stereotypical perceptions of Islam involving Chechen Black Widows and of crazed fanatics killing for Allah. On the contrary, these women felt great respect for all life and it was belief in God's mercy and, in some cases, God's judgment that allowed those who considered violence to refrain from it. The fact that none of the women questioned their faith, and that each woman's faith was strengthened by the role of God in their lives was interesting. This study adds to the research that suggests supporting refugee faith could assist in positive outcomes.

### **Generativity**

Having hope for the future has been found to be a protective factor in refugee groups, especially young people (Goodman, 2004; Lothe & Heggen, 2003). An important aspect of the women's generativity involved their faith and ethnicity, and the desire that valued Chechen traditions and identity be passed to the next generation. The women believed it was their responsibility to ensure their success in America in order to maintain their traditions and one day return to Chechnya.

### **Interconnections Between Themes**

Figure 1 and Table 2 below provide an integrative theoretical framework for the current study. One can see an illustration of the theoretical interpretive framework, which developed organically as a result of the phenomenological, critical feminist approach to this research project. As suggested by the figure below, every theme was impacted by every other theme. For example, it appears that deep faith in Islam combined with their pride as Chechens and their sense of responsibility as Chechen women to transmit Chechen values. This, in turn, gave the women a strong sense of their inherent value as human beings, while faith and ethnic pride helped support their agency and find moments of resistance where they could resist their oppressor through acts of personal assertion, kindness, and humanity. In this way, a critical

feminist perspective allows one to see the influences between agency, faith, ethnicity, gender, and generativity in the phenomenology of the lived experienced of Chechen women refugees.

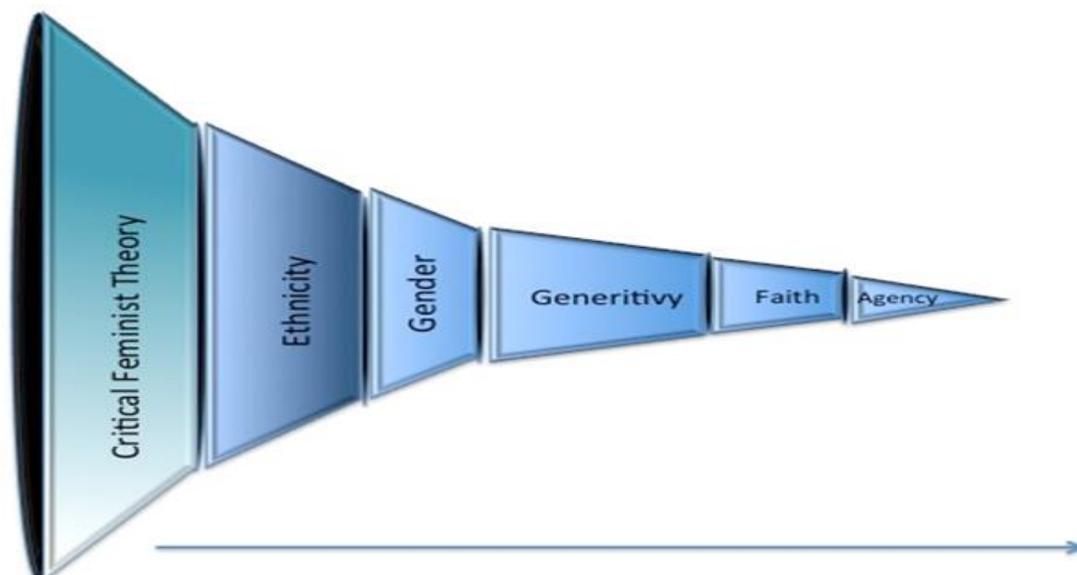


Figure 1: A Phenomenological Understanding of the Lived Experiences of Chechen Women

Table 2: Lived Experiences of Chechen Women: Major Themes

<b>Feminist Theory</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Faith</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Generativity</b>
Focuses on gender	The women saw their gender as source of strength	Ethnicity was a source of pride and strength	Faith helped the women survive by giving them hope for the future	The women saw themselves as actors capable of resistance and change	Generativity is supported by gender insofar as gender is related to the responsibility to transmit culture
Is committed to empowerment	Viewed themselves as bearers of ethnic pride	Mores and traditions sustained the women through the war and beyond	Faith is a critical element of Chechen culture	The women viewed their actions as supporting their survival and their own and their families' futures	Generativity is supported by faith insofar as faith helped with survival as well as the importance of transmitting faith
Highlights the agency of the excluded & knowledge is situated	Saw themselves as responsible for transmitting culture, faith, and ethnic pride	Needed to transmit ethnic pride and culture	Desire to transmit faith, and faith seen as an element of Chechen culture	The women felt empowered to resist and act as subjects, not mere objects	Ethnicity was related to generativity

## **Implications for Research and Theory**

As critical feminists, one must challenge common stereotypes of women refugees by incorporating their resistance, resilience, and agency into our understandings of their experience. A key task for the future is to incorporate narratives of resilience, resistance, and generativity into treatment and assistance programs. The key assumptions of this study align with the work of peace and conflict feminist scholars (Bandarage, 2008; Borer, 2009), recognizing that women are complex actors in armed conflicts. Participants' voices and stories were honored for both the suffering and survival of women war refugees and the assertion that more of their realities ought to be more represented in research.

By examining the survival of Chechen women following the armed conflict in Chechnya, the study addresses the need to incorporate cultural sensitivity into programs designed to assist Chechen and other refugee populations. The findings of this study can help inform health and community development programs for refugees in diaspora and those returning to post-conflict zones. Researchers should recognize the need for interaction between the cultural context and individual experiences, rethinking theory about trauma and its consequences to affirm the resilience and generativity of individuals (Walsh, 2002).

## **Significance for the Field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution**

There has been a shift in contemporary conflicts from conflicts between nations to intra-state violence where civilians are the primary targets (Kienzler, 2008), and these armed conflicts cause not only violent deaths but also forcible displacement. While men still account for the highest number of direct deaths in armed conflicts, children, women, and all displaced persons are the groups most vulnerable to the overall impact of wars (Human Security Report, 2009-2010).

First, this critical feminist focus on Chechen women refugees highlights the previously undocumented reality of these women's experience of conflict. Secondly, this research allows for a more complex understanding of the women's roles as agents in their own lives, an understanding that allows for an approach to those who suffer as a result of conflict that moves beyond the trauma model to allow for a cultural and gendered approach. These women refugees embody the figure of "bare life", yet they could engage in acts of agency, of "preferring not to", thus demonstrating that resistance and generativity are possible from the position of "bare life". This research suggests that it is important to learn how this agency and generativity is supported.

This study recorded the lived experiences of the participants, and suggests possible theoretical perspectives for future studies concerned with the well-being of conflict survivors by focusing on factors that encourage generativity. It contributes to the field of conflict analysis and resolution by responding to the need for contextualized studies to understand cultural responses to conflict, and of what factors may foster generativity in refugees and in post-conflict situations.

## **Further Research**

Future research could further address differences in generativity and life experience themes between male and female Chechen refugees. It is possible that male refugees will share many of the same concerns as the women regarding generativity. Interviewing men could lend insight into

men's relationships to the specific factors that influence women's generativity, such as ethnic pride and religion. Further research could also be undertaken in a community with a larger population of Chechens. Future studies could also further explore the factors that promote generativity for refugees. It would be useful to uncover more specific cultural values and practices from the country of origin that promote generativity.

## Conclusions

Given the refugee crisis of refugees in contemporary times, the high cost of refugee assistance programs, and the necessity of redeveloping war torn countries individuals working with these populations need a better understanding of refugees from their own perspectives. It is the authors' hope that this study provides the reader with a better understanding of how this particular group of refugee women viewed their lives, and how identity factors such as ethnicity, religion, and gender, related to feelings of generativity.

Feelings of generativity or the hope for future generations, has been shown to be a critical factor in social involvement and may be instrumental in motivating these women to rebuild their lives and societies. This research offers an important exploration of the lives of Chechen refugee women war survivors and factors related to their generativity. Given the importance of faith and the strong identification with their ethnic identity, and the correlation of these identity elements with generativity, this research suggests that programs designed to support faith and ethnicity might help create a space where generativity can be a more likely outcome, both for refugees and those who return to post-conflict societies. This study also lays important groundwork for developing more theoretical research on refugee generativity.

The women in this study experienced a significant dialectic in life. The life they knew was destroyed, and they were driven by the need to cross the river of their past suffering to get to the other side: their future. For these refugee women, the lived experience of being a Chechen woman meant living every day with the memory of war, struggling to adapt to a new culture while maintaining a strong Chechen identity, and choosing to care for the future. In crossing this dangerous and raging river, Dagmara one of the women summarized it best and she exemplified many elements of the other Chechen women's' experiences, including loss, danger, and fear for self and others, as well as the drive, in the face of it all, to keep living in her statement as follows:

We had just married, we got a lot of presents—you cannot take it with you. You leave it all there. We walked for days. Eventually we reached the river. The bridge had been washed out; this is a mountain river, very strong. Everybody got over the river, women, and children. My husband's brother came back for me . . . the men were helping us to get over. I was afraid that this man would fall. And you cannot help them; it's a very strong river. I was afraid. But Allah helped us, and everybody stayed alive. We got over . . . It felt like . . . like we were still alive. And like we needed to keep living.

Like the literal branch Dagmara crossed the river on, this narrative study revealed that the shaky branch that helped all the women cross from despair and suffering to generativity was composed primarily of two twines: their faith and their strong sense of ethnic pride.

The challenge for critical feminist conflict analysis and resolution is to find new narratives for understanding the workings and effects of conflict. This requires reaching across disciplines and creating coalitions of knowledge and political action, to explore the many moments of

agency, resistance, and generativity. This academic engagement requires that one pushes the boundaries of the discipline of conflict resolution and analysis in order to find new ways of hearing and exploring the stories of those who suffer, survive, and find ways to be generative despite their experiences of war and crisis.

This research has profound implications for individuals, agencies, organizations, and/or countries that aid, support, or may be responsible for refugees, as it provides perspectives of refugee experience from their own perspectives. This study may have transferability to other refugee populations, since refugees may share many common experiences, so further studies are encouraged in this area. This study identified gender as an important consideration and it is noteworthy that the experiences of women refugees may differ from those of men and children. Other studies are encouraged to work to unveil refugee realities, so their struggles and challenges are brought to the forefront of international attention and their needs are addressed rather than diminished, ignored, or forgotten. The refugee crisis we face today may very well be among the most challenging human crises in contemporary times and it is the hope of the current researchers that an improved understanding and deeper discovery into refugee perspectives and realities will render better alternatives and interventions to address this crisis.

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## **CHANGES: A CONFLICT MANAGEMENT MODEL FOR ORGANIZATIONAL REDESIGN EFFORTS**

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### **Abstract**

Organizational design enhances a company's business strategy by configuring and reconfiguring organizations through the alignment of processes, rewards, policies, structures, and practices. When the organizational design process takes place, the multiple changes involved have the potential to spur conflict that can adversely affect employees and the organization itself. Though conflict naturally ensues during organizational change, it can be successfully lessened with proper management. The purpose of this paper is to present a conflict management model for change agents to use when involved in organizational design. The model uses the acronym CHANGES, which stands for areas of attention for change agents to consider throughout the design process. These areas are: Communication, Help, Assessment, New Roles, Guidelines, Education, and Support.

*Keywords:* organizational design, conflict management, organizational change, conflict antecedents

### **Introduction**

An oft-heard phrase warns; there is nothing guaranteed in life but change. Dynamic organizations are no exception. Their ever-changing systems are due in part to pressures of competition, strategy and personnel restructuring, and progress in technology (Galbraith, Downey, & Kates, 2002; Heerwagen, Kelly, & Kampschroer, 2010). One can argue that another guaranteed occurrence could be added to that old, repeated phrase. Conflict is often an inevitable component of organizational change (Andersen, 2006; Montana & Charnov, 2000; Raza & Standing, 2011).

The reasons for the conflict during organizational design vary. The purpose of this paper is to present a conflict management model for change agents to use when involved in organizational design. The paper will explore researchers' conclusions determining the antecedents of conflict during the change process as well as various management techniques for assuaging negative conflict instigated by organizational design. A CHANGES model is introduced for change agents to employ when involved in the process of organizational design.

### **Organizational Design**

Galbraith et al. (2002) explain that organizations have three distinct levers of change. They consist of creating the company vision and strategy, choosing executive team members, and organizational design. Though the three are often intertwined, it is the third that involves "the process of configuring structures, processes, reward systems, and people practices and policies to

create an effective organization capable of achieving the business strategy” (p. 2). Once an organizational design is established in a budding business, the attention to this key lever needs to remain a focus of consideration. Organizational design is an iterative process. The evolutionary tendency of organizations requires executives to periodically redesign the organizations to meet the business’ current needs (Beckman, 2009; Galbraith et al., 2002; Kesler & Kates, 2011). Failure to take the time to assess organizational design fit can adversely affect the organization’s sustainability (McGee & Molloy, 2003).

Hubler and Glick (1993) posit that environmental turbulence in organizations continues to occur at a rapid pace. Because of this acceleration, “organizational redesign will become more and more commonplace and critical” (p. 8). Triggers that evoke a redesign process include: the addition of a new division or company within the organization, plan for growth, a change in top management, strategic change, internal realignment, external environmental changes, and organizational performance problems (Galbraith et al., 2002). The iterative nature of the redesign leads to increased opportunities for conflict during those changes.

### **Antecedents of Design-Initiated Conflict**

One standard definition of conflict does not exist (Cox, 2001; Katielidou et al., 2012; Kelly, 2006). However, for the purposes of this paper, it can be described as “a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party” (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010, p. 373). Certain aspects of organizational design are commonly responsible for the initiation of conflict. Recognition of these antecedents helps organizational executives become aware of the possibility of conflict and take action to assuage it when appropriate (Patton, 2014).

### **Complexity of Organizations**

As previously stated, the more turbulent the organization, the more likely it will need to be redesigned. The constant flux of the dynamic, complex organization makes for a stressful environment that can be perceived as overwhelming (Haraway & Haraway, 2005). This atmosphere of stress is so intensified during organizational changes such as redesign efforts, that the development of conflict is heightened (Andersen, 2006).

### **Personal Factors**

Individual responses to the redesign efforts are one of the prime reasons for organizational design problems (Saksvik, 2007). While some individuals are receptive to organizational changes, others find themselves quite resistant (Heichberger, 1974; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010, Oreg, 2003; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Kreitner and Kinicki, (2010) describe change resistance as an “emotional/behavioral response to real or imagined threats to an established work routine” (p. 549). The authors cite three potential reasons for change resistance: a poor relationship between the change agent and the change recipient, the change agent’s actions and/or inactions lead to resistance, or the resistor is unreasonable and self-interested.

In the implementation stage of organizational design, it is vital to communicate the new design and strategy prior to its enactment (Galbraith et al., 2002). An example of a change agent’s inaction causing resistance would be a failure to communicate a new design to

subordinates. Though apprised of the changes, every employee may not necessarily agree with the changes. That is expected; however, it is the change agent's duty to manage skepticism and help subordinates "get comfortable with new configurations, roles, and expectations" (p. 254). Failure to inform employees about the reason for the redesign, as well as its course and consequences, increases the chances of an anxious and insecure workforce since unanswered questions prevail and rumors circulate (Andersen, 2006). Unfortunately, full disclosure of information is often avoided in the implementation of change (Paulus, 2002; Stasser, 1999). Open lines of communication are imperative to mitigate organizational conflict (Robbins, 1998; Van Tonder, Havenga, & Visagie, 2008; Vecchio, 2000).

Individual perceptions regarding change can lead to employees who favor the organizational design process at odds with those who are resisting such a change. Some employees may benefit more than others in the design process, which can lead to dissention. Conflict may erupt between those who perceive themselves to be winners versus losers in the design implementation (Andersen, 2006; Fawcett & Johnstone, 2010).

Organizational design is sometimes catalyzed by lack of agreement on social norms. Griffiths and Gilly (2012) note that in service industries, people practices and policies may require alterations due to customer belief conflicts. The authors give the example of a café encounter. Some customers may disagree with others about rights of occupying space in the café. One customer may subscribe to the theory of "rent in perpetuity," where a café visitor can stay in the facility as long as they chose, perhaps hours after s/he consumed a café product (p. 143). Another customer may completely differ in beliefs. The "rent until consumed" approach to territoriality involves a customer's right to space "as long as it takes to consume the purchased food/drink" (p. 143). When this type of individual belief conflict occurs, managers must decide whether it would behoove the business to create a clear policy to limit the conflicts that arise from lack of agreement on social norms.

### **Role Conflict and Ambiguity**

During the course of reconfiguring organizational structures, new organizational roles often arise. An organizational role is a specific "organizational component defined by a unique outcome and set of responsibilities" (Galbraith et al., 2002, p. 81). In organizational design, the components can stay the same but the roles involved will most likely be altered. Galbraith et al. (2002) posit that the creation of organizational roles may be the most important design activity to the organization's employees. With transitions in workers' roles and responsibilities comes role conflict and role ambiguity. Role conflict occurs when an employee receives incompatible demands from different leaders (Andersen, 2006; Chen & Spector, 1992; Rogers & Molnar, 1976). Role ambiguity results when an employee is lacking in information regarding duties or expectations are inadequately communicated (Rogers & Molnar, 1976). Role conflict and role ambiguity are responsible for the eruption of multiple interpersonal conflicts in the workplace (Andersen, 2006; Kantek & Kavla, 2007; Kath, Stichler, Ehrhart, & Sievers, 2013; Van de Vliert, 1998).

Change agents often focus so much on change resisters during redesign efforts that they overlook the potential damaging effects of role conflict and ambiguity (Cooper & Markus, 1995; Raza & Standing, 2011). Changes in job functions are often accompanied by fear and defensiveness as concerns regarding job security and role identification arise (Pichault, 1995; Saksvik et al., 2007). Job security is a grave concern for employees during mergers and

acquisitions, as the chance of reductions in force is high. Problems of role changes occur during organizational design, which include receiving incompatible demands from different leaders (Andersen, 2006; Chen & Spector, 1992), and an employee completing tasks that are generally not included in their daily work assignments (Andersen, 2006). Role conflict results in employee uncertainty (Ameen, Jackson, Pasewark, & Strawser, 1995; Keim, Landis, Peirce, & Earnest, 2014). One outlet of uncertainty and insecurity is aggressive behavior, which is often displaced instead of targeted at the source. This reaction often leads to interpersonal conflict (Andersen, 2006). Hence, workplace interpersonal aggression is a common response to organizational woes (Andersen, 2006; Fox & Spencer, 1999). Van Tonder et al. (2008) understand this possible consequence as they warn, “the uncertainty that accompanies organizational change heightens prospects for intra organizational conflict” (p. 373).

Randall (2007) conducted a qualitative study that describes a real-life organizational design example of employees completing tasks generally not required of them. The study revealed that in the structural reconfiguration, case managers were now “being held financially accountable and are primarily from nursing backgrounds” (p. 5). The case managers’ added responsibilities contributed to a “significant” increase in their stress levels (p. 6). They were forced to make decisions about how to allocate resources, which often made them uncomfortable about the quality of care provided. The nurse participants in Randall’s study were accustomed to providing the best possible care without focusing on the cost involved. This refocus of attention to financial concerns led to a type of individual conflict in which the new role conflicts with the individual’s value system.

### **Lack of Social Support**

When social support is lacking, employees can experience negative feelings. Types of social support are: appraisal support, which consists of performance feedback; informational support, which helps to answer employee questions; instrumental support, which offers tangible aid to employees; and emotional support, which involves feelings of trust and care (Andersen, 2006; Maleki & Demaray, 2003). Unfortunately, social support deficiencies occur frequently during organizational change (Andersen, 2006). Greater social interaction will increase commitment to change, when followers perceive fairness in the change processes, according to a study by Bouckenooghe, De Clercq, and Deprez (2014) When a perception of fairness is lacking, however, “personal clashes not only are more likely to emerge, but the negative emotions (e.g. frustration, anxiety) that come with them are more easily triggered, further reducing employees’ commitment to change” (p. 531). Thus, the authors advise that in cases where the organizational crisis impedes fairness perceptions or relational conflict resolution, leaders may consider discouraging informal interactions with followers during the change process.

### **Power Dynamics**

Organizational design can involve tipping points. A tipping point is “a change in power that shifts the company’s momentum in a new direction” (Kesler & Kates, 2011, p. 228). Power shifts, whether they result in more power to an individual or to an entire department or unit, seldom take place without conflict. Though the reason for the shift in power may have great strategic foundations, the individual or group of individuals losing power and status may resent the shift to another individual or group.

Affective conflicts could ensue when shifts in power take place as a result of redesign efforts. Affective conflicts “are characterized by personal antagonism, collaborative difficulties and the parties’ hostile feelings towards each other” (Andersen, 2006, p. 221). The parties who perceive a loss in power may misinterpret strategic reasoning for personal assault, resulting in “hostile attribution error” (p. 222). Consequences of this misinterpretation may lead to mutual opposition and escalated conflict. Even in cases where there is shared power, top executives often are in conflict with each other due to “issues of executive coordination and responsibility,” where executives ask each other, “who’s supposed to do what, how soon, and where” (Morrill, 1991, p. 591).

Power struggles also occur when organizational design results in process changes. Pichault (1995) offers several case studies illustrating “power games” during organizational changes due to process changes, including one that occurred in a health care facility. The health care organization’s top administrators invested in an integrated computer system resulted in less duplication of services, such as identification procedures and registration processes. However, physicians complained about the new system and refused to computerize their accounts, citing them as confidential. Shweta and Jha (2010) asserted that refusal to complete assigned duties as an antecedent to interpersonal conflict between the party assigning the task and the one who refuses to do so. Pichault’s (1995) health care case study exemplifies Raza and Standing’s (2011) assessment that organizational changes frequently lead to conflicts that “hinder the change process” (p. 187).

The case study also illustrates Galbraith et al.’s (2002) point about coordinating mechanisms in organizations. In the case, the computerized system coordinates various departments of the organization. Differences in points of view emerge as this change takes place. Openly discussing disparate views reduces groupthink and complacency, resulting in a type of functional conflict (Jehn, 1995). These differences can result in better ideas and decisions (Galbraith et al., 2002; Nemeth, Personnaz, Personnaz, & Goncalo, 2004). However, they can also lead to bullying to lead others to accept the bullies’ point of view. They can also result in a compromise between the two parties, without resolving the problem, simply for the intent of preserving friendships. Of the last two results, the latter is worse, according to Galbraith et al. (2002).

## **Work Demands and Time Pressures**

It is the implementation phase that will typically affect the most employees during the change. Saksvik (2009) cites a 2000 study conducted by Grimsmo and Hilsen that revealed, “48% of employees totally or partly agreed that the management neglects the work environment while focusing on organizational changes” (p. 46). This can lead to resentment and extra duties for employees. Increased workload can lead to exhaustion, which Petrou, Demerouti, and Schaufeli (2015) describe as “one of the most common costs of organizational change in terms of occupational health” (p. 477).

The complexity of contemporary businesses calling for iterative organizational redesigns, coupled with the rising employee workload, indicates a growing conflict-riddled workforce. Work overload is positively related to interpersonal conflict (Jaramillo, Mulki, & Boles, 2011). The number of work hours has shown to be positively correlated to worker conflict (Spector, Dwyer, & Jex 1988). Jaramillo et al. (2011) posit that work overload is on the rise in today’s economy.

## **Managing Design-Initiated Conflict**

Conflict is inevitable in organizations (Dougan & Mulkey, 1996; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010; Pichault, 1995). And it is certainly prevalent during organizational design processes. In the words of Lingnan University of Hong Kong's Dean Tjosvold, "change begets conflict, conflict begets change" (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010, p. 372). Schein (2010) acknowledges that there are various interpretations of the word conflict and well as its connotations. Some feel that conflict refers to a "severe disagreement that is difficult if not impossible to reconcile. Similarly, they may feel that it is bad because it implies poor management skills. Others, like Schein, feel that conflict refers to any level of disagreement involving two or more individuals and that wherever humans interact, there will naturally be some level of conflict. The former mindset is more traditional; the latter is a relatively new trend in western organizational literature (Andersen, 2006).

### **Constructive Versus Destructive Conflict**

Though some still view conflict as purely dysfunctional, conflict can potentially result in positive outcomes (Jehn, 1995; Nemeth et al., 2004; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999; Rahim, 2002). Andersen (2006) proffers that conflict does not only represent crisis but also invites possibility. Eisenhardt, Kahwajy, & Bourgeois (1998) assert that senior executives engaging in conflict is often essential for effective strategies to evolve. When conflict results in a "healthy and vigorous challenge of ideas, beliefs, and assumptions," conflict can transform a good organizational design process into a better one (Menon, Bharadwaj, & Howell, 2001, p. 303). For example, if a process change in an organization presents with glitches in its implementation and the users communicate their disapproval of those problems, interactive dialogue between the change agent and the employee(s) involved in the process change can result in a highly functional, usable alternative. The conflict may also prevent a change from occurring if those affected by the proposed change find it unnecessary and voice their opinions to the change agent (Heichberger, 1974).

Andersen (2009) posits that in order to manage conflict effectively, organizations must create an environment where task-oriented conflicts are accepted and welcomed" (p. 46). He continues that establishing norms for dealing with such conflict is essential. In fact, a conflict culture, one that is open to conflict, flexible, and changeable, helps increase the sustainability of the organization (Andersen, 2009; Putnam, 1997; Rahim, 2002).

Conbere (2001) believes that dealing with conflict is imperative. "Managing conflict has been recognized as an important task in organizations for at least three reasons" (p. 215). He describes those reasons as follows. First, the trend of focusing on collaboration means that employees must work together while overcoming their differences. Second, content employees are apt to stay in the workplace. Retention of employees is essential with the rapidly growing retirement of Baby Boomers. Finally, the cost of litigation to resolve conflicts is ever increasing; early management can prevent such litigation. The third reason Conbere describes sounds more like conflict resolution than conflict management.

Andersen (2006) differentiates conflict management and conflict resolution. He describes the goal of conflict management as channeling "an existing conflict in a constructive direction rather than eliminating it" (p. 226). Conflict resolution, on the other hand, implies that conflict is dysfunctional and must be diminished or totally eliminated (Andersen, 2006). Haraway and Haraway (2005) caution leaders "not to try to eliminate conflict" (p. 11). Rather, they advise

managing the disagreements in order to become more efficient. Some of the conflict literature still reveals those who feel that conflict “elimination of conflict is always the goal,” regardless of whether the differences seem constructive in the beginning (Dougan and Mulkey, 1996, p. 3). Wall and Callister (1995) insist that scholars who promote moderate conflict in the workplace, or who believe that there could be an insufficient amount of conflict in the workplace, are confusing conflict with debate. They warn that conflict is apt to escalate and cause deleterious effects to an organization. Escalating workplace conflict can lead to such negative outcomes as decreased performance and job satisfaction (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003), as well as the potential of consultation and litigation expenses (Freres, 2013).

## **Mergers and Acquisitions**

As described previously, one type of organizational design involves acquisition of a new company or division within the organization. Weber, Rachim-Moore, & Tarba (2011) conducted a study of cross-cultural mergers which verified that productivity improved with an increase in communication during the organizational design process. They found “an increase in post-merger communication is positively related to acquirer performance” (p. 93). However, the increased communication “was found to have a significant positive association with performance in Japan and Denmark and a significant negative association for German acquirers” (p. 89). This finding exemplifies the need to take caution when undergoing cross-cultural organizational design processes as various cultures may have differing preferred styles of dealing with organizational changes.

Research conducted by Cohen, Birkin, Cohen, Garfield, and Webb (2006) revealed several factors that resulted in a successful acquisition redesign effort. First, the acquirers held an “all-hands meeting” at the time of the acquisition disclosure (p. 326). This helped assuage any fears and uncertainty early on. Second, no layoffs took place in the initial phase of this acquisition, which is uncommon during many acquisitions and mergers. Furthermore, the acquiring organization had a history of prior successful acquisitions, which allayed fears of unnecessary changes taking place. During the acquisition process, the organization facilitated upward feedback by sending surveys to all employees, asking for their opinions of various situations. This measure helped the employees feel as though their opinions were valued. The authors revealed that the acquiring organization demonstrated significant respect for the acquired organization during the transition, which further added to the success of the integration. The participants revealed that the acquirer expressed satisfaction with the acquired organization’s employees, noting that the organization was quite successful. By enhancing employee and organizational self-esteem, the emotional impact of the acquisition was minimized. Additionally, “it set up an atmosphere in which employees wanted to demonstrate their capabilities” (p. 325).

One factor that led to conflict was the shift in the company culture. The adaptation to the new culture proved difficult to some of the participants. Cohen et al. (2006) heard participants speak longingly of the way things were done in the past. They shared that the acquisition made for a “typical corporate environment” and that there was “plodding in the quagmire of the corporate world” (p. 324). Although most participants’ jobs remained the same, the atmosphere changed. The participants from the acquired company also felt increased pressure to meet deadlines, as the acquired company’s due dates were much more flexible than that of the acquiring company.

## CHANGES Model

Change agents can use the acronym CHANGES to manage conflict when undertaking organizational design measures (see figure 1). CHANGES stands for Communication, Help, Assessment, New Roles, Guidelines, Education, and Support. By remembering these six areas throughout the design process, negative conflict can be lessened. In large organizations, it may be beneficial to assign an individual or team to each one of the six. Communication throughout the entire project will assuage fears and uncertainties. Help refers to the extra assistance that workers need while changes are taking place and transition of roles occur. Assessment applies to an overall look at the effectiveness of the entire operation. Organizational design efforts start with an assessment of the current climate to determine if any changes could increase organizational effectiveness.

Once structures, processes, reward systems, people practices, and/or policies are recognized as being in need of change, and the changes put in place, assessing the soundness of those changes is vital. Assessment includes offering employees honest feedback during the change process to address issues before they fester. Self-assessments will help the change agents realize what is working and what may require more attention. New roles need to be defined so employees understand their contribution to the organization during mid-design and post-design. Guidelines such as rules and policies may change during design – define and communicate these guidelines to the affected employees. Education is needed to avoid power differentials and to explain new procedures and processes. Finally, support demonstrates care for the employees and making them more comfortable with the changes. This is a vital element when attempting to manage conflict during organizational design.

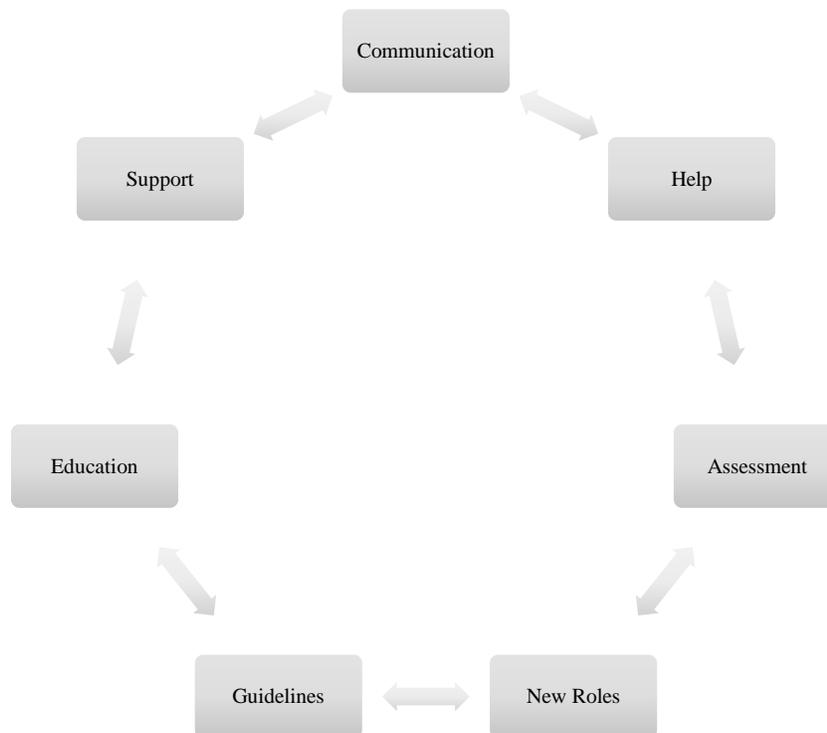


Figure 1: The CHANGES Model

Kotter (1996) posited that 70% of change efforts are unsuccessful at achieving intended outcomes. Conflict in the change process inhibits goal achievement. Utilization of the CHANGES model can increase chances of an effective organizational design effort. The CHANGES Model provides change agents with specific areas to address during organizational design to help manage conflict during this often-difficult process.

### **Recommendations for the Design Process**

For the purposes of this paper, conflict management takes into consideration the possibility of escalation. Thus, the following recommendations for transitioning the design process more smoothly are suggested, when considering many of the possible antecedents. These recommendations follow the CHANGES model. This is not a linear model; rather, the suggested actions are to take place whenever needed, often periodically.

#### **Communication**

Communication is a key component in the organizational design plan (Galbraith et al., 2002; Saksvik et al., 2007). In order to avoid fear and speculation, articulation of the “rationale for the change, the options that were considered, and how a redesign has benefits that outweigh the current state” needs to be delivered to the workforce (Galbraith et al., 2002, p. 258). Explaining the plans, more than once and at regular intervals, will contribute to employees’ understanding of the design process. This direct, transparent approach can assuage conflict that results from fear and speculation.

When change agents take the time to inform employees through openly discussing roles, expectations, and intentions, the employees’ well-being most likely will increase, while concurrently reducing the sense of uncertainty and fear. Sears, Shi, Coberley & Pope (2013) conclude that overall well-being is positively correlated to employee productivity and retention. Thus, investing the time for clear communication will lead to a more effective organizational design outcome.

#### **Help**

As Kreitner and Kinicki (2010) suggested, a change agent’s actions or inactions can lead to resistance during organizational change. One such inaction, as noted earlier, is management’s neglect of the work environment while focusing on the changes (Saksvik, 2009). Managers can prepare for the increased workloads and added responsibilities of large organizational design efforts by hiring contingent workers to help out during the process. This temporary pool of employees can be useful in attending to matters that might otherwise have been delegated to already stressed employees. In smaller design efforts, or large ones that do not run the threat of employee exhaustion, help can be as simple as leadership rounding on employees. Rounding, also known as management by walking around (MBWA), involves leaders periodically walking around the staff (Dean & Dean, 2015). If leaders recognize a need for additional help, providing such help by personally lending a hand temporarily or by utilizing cross-trained employees serves to proactively prevent exhaustion or failure to reach job goals. Leaders cannot expect that subordinates will apprise them of problems; this information must be sought out (Galbraith et al., 2002).

## **Assessment**

This step is vital to any strategic planning endeavor. It is an assessment process that catalyzes the entire organizational design process. Prior to making any changes, the current climate is assessed to determine if it aligns with the success of the organization. Then once any structures, processes, reward systems, people practices, and/or policies are recognized as being in need of change, the design effort begins.

Assessment interviews can be used to determine which current employees fit into the new roles required in the design. Galbraith et al. (2002) describe the assessment interview as an in-depth (2-3 hour long) discussion between an internal or external interviewer and a current employee. The interview is meant to reveal the employee's past professional accomplishments and approaches to work. Since fresh skills need to be acquired rapidly when filling new roles, assessing learning aptitude is critical. The authors advise the interviewer to ask the current employees "to describe a time when they used or demonstrated the competency, the challenges they faced, and what they learned and applied from the experience" (p. 231). The staffing of new roles can be based on these assessments.

When changes are put in place, assessing the soundness of those changes is vital. Assessment includes offering employees honest feedback during the change process to address issues before they fester. Self-assessments will help the change agents realize what is working and what may require more attention. Upward feedback and customer feedback are also components of the assessment process. This can be accomplished through surveys, focus groups, or an intranet site specifically designed for questions, comments, and concerns involving the design efforts (Galbraith et al., 2002).

## **New Roles**

As aforementioned, role conflict and role ambiguity are antecedents to interpersonal conflicts in the workplace (Andersen, 2006; Kantek & Kavla, 2007; Kath, Stichler, Ehrhart, & Sievers, 2013; Van de Vliert, 1998). Changes in roles directly affect employees and can cause unease. This unease can be attributed to unfamiliarity with the new roles, perceptions of job insecurity, and fear of change itself. Employees should be well aware of their roles, as "job insecurity is negatively related to readiness for change" (Saksvik et al., 2007, p. 258). Clarifying roles should be done through constructive conflict and one-on-one discussions.

Role ambiguity has been found to decrease job performance (Celik, 2013). Employee angst lessens when revised expectations and duties are plainly articulated rather than assumed. Leaders are advised to discuss the changes not only with subordinates, but with their colleagues as well. This keeps role conflict at a minimum. When employees receive disparate demands from various leaders, they may become confused and conflicted as to whose orders to follow while still remaining in good standing within the organization. A shared vision for the organizational design reduces conflict.

## **Guidelines**

Creating guidelines strengthens the idea of a shared vision for the design. These guidelines are administered through rules and policies that communicate expectations. New rules and policies that accompany the organizational design process need to be clearly communicated, not

only verbally but give employees a written copy for future reference. In addition to merely communicating the new rules and policies, explain the reasons for the changes. Free (2012) asserts that when employees understand the reasons for new rules and policies, they are more apt to follow them.

## **Education**

Educating about new rules and policies and their reasoning is one element of this component. Other educational needs may include introduction to new technology and procedures. Once the new information is exchanged, change agents can assign those with higher learning aptitude as mentors to others who need additional instruction. The more familiar the staff becomes with the changes, the greater the chance of a successful outcome. Employees also must be encouraged to invest in their own development so a culture of learning is established (Galbraith et al., 2002).

## **Support**

Change agents must find ways to address emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal support needs during organizational design. By taking time to keep employees abreast of changes, express concern for their needs and fears, give regular feedback, and ensure they get additional help with work overload these needs will be lessened. Each of the types of social support has “a significant effect on the experience of change on one’s job position,” according to a study on the effects on employee health during organizational mergers conducted by Vaananen, Pahkin, Kalimo, & Buunk (2004, p. 1903).

## **Conclusion**

Organizational design should be conducted whenever there is a misalignment of strategy, structure, processes, people, and rewards within the company. Certain triggers that catalyze this misalignment are the acquisition of a new company within the organization, planned growth, a change in executive leadership, strategic change, internal or external changes, and organizational performance troubles. When the organizational design process is implemented, the multiple changes involved can inadvertently cause problems for the employees and the organization itself through the presence of conflict. Some antecedents of conflict include the complexity of the organization, personal factors, role conflict and ambiguity, lack of social support, power dynamics, and work demands and time pressures. Though not all conflict is dysfunctional, it is helpful to assuage growing conflict before it adversely affects the organization at a micro or macro level. The CHANGES model advises change agents to attend to areas of Communication, Help, Assessment, New Roles, Guidelines, Education, and Support throughout the design process. By employing the CHANGES model, change agents can increase their chances of a successful organizational design initiative.

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