PLANNED RENEGOTIATION: 
THE PINCH MODEL

Planned renegotiation, developed by John J. Sherwood and John C. Glidewell (1973, 1975) and extended by John Sherwood and John Scherer (1975), is based on the premise that relationships in a social system—a pair, a group, an organization, or a community—seldom proceed as planned or expected. The model describes how social systems are established and become stabilized so that work can get done and how change can enter the system.

THE MODEL

As the model describes the probable cycle of relationships, it suggests a strategy for anticipating and controlling change. The cycle consists of four systematic phases.

Sharing Information and Negotiating Expectations
Whenever two or more people begin an association, no matter how brief, they exchange information about themselves. From this information, they begin to predict—although they may not specify—what they can expect from one another and how their association will proceed. Uncertainty is diminished by these implicit or negotiated expectations.

Commitment
As the parties involved begin to understand their respective roles and their shared expectations, they make commitments to one another. The strength of an individual’s commitment and the range of his or her behavior encompassed by the role are measures of the importance of the particular relationship. Whether strong or weak, the commitments represent the agreements by the participants to live up to the expectations. The more important the relationship, the more evidence of commitment is required.

Stability and Productivity
Once commitments are made, the relationship becomes stable. Energy can be turned from sustaining the relationship toward productivity, generally with each person performing in accordance with the shared expectations. Although stability does not guarantee productivity, it is necessary for productive work to occur.
Disruption

It is assumed that a disruption eventually occurs in the stability of any association. The disruption may be internal to the association—one party or the other is not performing in accordance with expectations—or it may arise from some external source, such as the addition of a new person to the group or a reallocation of resources. Disruption is inevitable because individuals, groups, and organizations change as a consequence of interactions with their environments. Thus, new experiences or education may cause disruption, as the changed person returns to the unchanged role.

OPENING OF THE SYSTEM

When their expectations of an association are disrupted, the participants become uncertain. Their uncertainty is accompanied by anxiety, and the social system of the association is open to change. Expectations are no longer fixed, new information can enter the system, and the renegotiation of expectations can occur.

The paradox is that the very moment the system is most open to change, there are strong inhibiting forces working to return things to “the way it used to be” because of the anxiety that accompanies uncertainty. To relieve their anxiety, the participants might do any of the following.

- Return to phase one to share information and negotiate new expectations;
- Terminate the association; or, most likely,
- Return to the way things were before the disruption.

What often occurs is a ritualized commitment to prior expectations, such as an apology, handshake, or embrace, without admitting into the system the new information. The relationship remains closed to change when the parties deal with the uncertainty and anxiety produced by disruption by returning to the original level of expectations without renegotiation. If this is not feasible, they may end the relationship.

The theory predicts that disruption without renegotiation leads to increasing frequency and intensity of disruption. If the source of disruption is not remedied or improved, if the problem is not addressed, it is likely to persist and to add to the intensity of future disruptions precipitated by new problems. In fact, “return to the way things used to be” is actually a withdrawal of commitment to the relationship or association. The more inflexible the system, the more likely that a final disruptive event will be explosive and destructive.

PLANNED RENEGOTIATION

The Planned Renegotiation Model offers an alternative course of action. It recommends that an association anticipate disruption and plan in advance for renegotiation of the original expectations. In this way, the participants do not have to make important
renegotiations under the stress of uncertainty and anxiety after the disruption, but address these issues as a part of an ongoing, stable process. New information forms the basis for renegotiating the expectations that govern the relationship. When new information is allowed to enter the relationship and is treated in a problem-solving way, new expectations can be formed. These are more likely to be in line with the current realities of the situation, and once commitment occurs, the period of stability is likely to be more enduring before the next disruption.

Even termination of the relationship is likely to be a constructive, problem-solving solution when it is a consequence of renegotiation.

If the parties share this model as part of their mutual expectations, it can increase their tolerance for the uncertainty and anxiety that accompany relationships while expectations are held open during renegotiation. Going through the renegotiation process itself increases the participants’ behavioral skills in doing so.

**Pinch**

The keys to planned renegotiation are understanding the model of the cycles of a relationship and sharing information whenever a “pinch” is experienced by one or more parties. A pinch is a signal of the possibility of an impending disruption; it describes a sense of loss of freedom within one’s current role. This may be caused by a sense of expanded resources or by subtle constriction of expectations by others. If not addressed, a pinch is likely to become a “crunch”—a major disruption. The question of renegotiation should be raised whenever an individual feels a pinch in the association. Some examples of pinches are as follows:

- “I think that I would like to go on this trip alone.”
- “Although I will continue to do the drafting work on this project, I would like to do some engineering work, too.”
- “I find that I am very hesitant to disagree with you because I am afraid that you won’t like me (then . . . will turn against me).”
- “I do not express my opinions in this group because all discussions seem to be dominated by a few individuals.”

When the question of renegotiation of expectations is raised at the point in the relationship when one of the members feels a pinch, the parties have more choice and more control over change. They are subject to fewer negotiations “under fire” and they are less likely to become victims of crises or pressures to return to the way things used to be.

The cycle of planned renegotiation can be illustrated as shown on the following page.

It is important that people learn to detect pinches before disruptions develop. A pinch is usually felt by an individual, whereas a disruption is experienced by all parties involved in the relationship. It is therefore the responsibility of the individual who feels
The PINCH Model
the pinch to raise the issue of renegotiation—rather than asserting that it is someone else’s responsibility—before a disruption engulfs others. All members of the system must understand that anxiety is a natural part of the process and that there must be a mutual commitment to problem solving.

**USE OF THE MODEL**

The Planned Renegotiation model offers a strategy for staying out of trouble rather than getting out of trouble. Those who have implemented the concepts return to praise them and report exciting results. The use of the concepts leads to the learning of behavioral skills through insight, reinforcement, and imitation. In experimental situations, the model can be used to teach process observation and to practice sharing process information. When a group is experiencing anxiety, the model can be used to clarify the situation and the options for the future.

Planned renegotiation is a procedure by which controlled change can enter a system or organization; it is intended to become part of the normative structure of an organization. It is most likely to be successful as a norm-setting intervention in an organization when there is some prior commitment to the concept of organization development. It supplies a theoretical framework to guide behavior in building more productive working relationships.

In using this model, people initially are dealing with the model and trying out problem-solving skills in addition to dealing with the content of the pinch and the situation. Over time, the skills and procedures will become more habitual, and the renegotiation will occur more easily.

It may be helpful to have the parties involved specify in writing what they expect from the relationship (including any desired change) and what they are willing to give in return. In a work relationship, a final, written agreement may specify the agreed-on changes or behaviors expected from each party, including possible sanctions for noncompliance. It is expected that any pinch will be brought up for discussion before noncompliance occurs. Third-party consultation can be very helpful in this process.

**REFERENCE**


**SOURCES**
