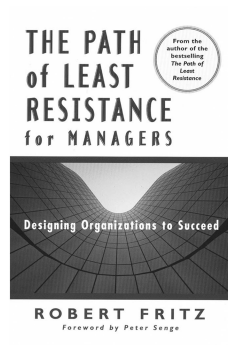




"The Path of Least Resistance for Managers is down-to-earth and inspiring. It introduces fundamental ideas and tools that can truly make a difference in how an organization functions, while simultaneously encouraging our deepest aspirations. It, like Fritz himself, embodies the simple truth that all creating occurs where principle meets practice."

— Peter Senge, author of THE FIFTH DISCIPLINE, developer of Systems Thinking and the theory of "learning organizations."



THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE FOR MANAGERS

Designing Organizations To Succeed

By Robert Fritz

Insights into how you can create the results you want for your company, with the revolutionary business tools of Structural Dynamics.

PROLOGUE

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Crossing the frontier of the old West, the covered wagons found that much of their route was already laid out for them to follow. It had been forged by herds of the Great Plains bison as they moved across the terrain through the previous centuries.

Later, when track was laid for railroads, surveyors found their best routes were these very same buffalo paths that pointed the way to the Rockies and beyond to the Promised Land of California. The master railroad designers of the Nineteenth Century chose these trails because they were the best ones anyone could have developed. The buffalo had found the optimal passage and anticipated the future movement across the vast continent.

How did these magnificent animals accomplish such a feat? They followed the principle of *the path of least resistance*. As they moved through the land, they placed one foot in front of the next. Each step guided the next step. What determined each step was the topography -- the contour of the earth. When faced with a sudden incline, or group of rocks, or thorny stubble, the bison would adjust their course and seek the easiest next step.

Step led to step and way led to way, deepening the path over time. Each new herd that traveled through the land found it natural to move where their predecessors had gone before.

The bison were following the laws of nature. We all do, as we all must, whether we like it or not. And in nature, energy moves where it is easiest to go. This is the principle of the path of least resistance.

Water in a riverbed must follow the path of least resistance, as must electrons through a circuit, as must wind blowing through a canyon, as must weather patterns crossing the planet. As we do, ourselves, as we pass through our lives.

The phrase the path of least resistance has two distinct meanings, one colloquial, and one scientific. The colloquial means the easy way out. "Al took the path of least resistance," may mean that Al was a lazy, slipshod creep, who avoided the necessary hard work, and, consequently, produced a lousy outcome. This is not the meaning of the phrase in this book.

We will use the scientific insight, which is that *energy moves along the path of least resistance*. In other words, energy moves where it is easiest to go.

This is true for organizations within the multinational corporate world as it is for water flowing through a riverbed, and blood surging through the bloodstream.

We all understand this principle, but we forget it when we think about our organizations or about our own lives. And yet, the principle is always in operation. It never sleeps. It never goes on vacation. It never takes a day off. We may seem to move from situation to situation, or event to event, or financial quarter to financial quarter or from year to year. But through it all, we are moving along the path of least resistance.

Sometimes the path leads us to great difficulty, sometimes to easy success. Sometimes the path will lead us to be able to accomplish great deeds, and other times lead us to banging our heads against the wall.

The path changes and as it changes, we must go along. So, when we're in the thick of it, and all hell is breaking loose, and we feel that we've done our best, but that our best wasn't good enough, and that other people were the ones who really screwed-up, and we are paying the price...we are in that situation because the path of least resistance has brought us there.

I know that this can be a terribly uncomfortable thought at first glance. But it also can be a comforting thought as well, because if in nature we can only travel the path of least resistance (scientific meaning), then for us to go somewhere else, we need to form a *different* path of least resistance. And that's what this book is all about.

The things we have tried in the past that haven't worked can lead us to a conclusion -- that our path of least resistance didn't support the cause, and must have lead us in a different direction than we wanted to go. This observation can be made about your organizational work, and about your life. The path *unchanged* equals more of the same patterns. The path *changed* equals new possibilities for success.

The primary strategy of this book is to take the principle of path of least resistance seriously. Once we do, we can recognize that when we are having difficulties and things are getting tougher, anything we do to change the situation won't work long term if we haven't re-routed the path of least resistance. We will see why the great majority of organizational change efforts that have been tried have failed. We will see that often it's not the content of the change -- be it TQM, re-engineering, or the flavor of the month -- but that the path of least resistance didn't support those change efforts within those organizations, even though the same approach may have worked well in other organizations.

If we truly understand the profundity of the principle of the path of least resistance, we come to realize that often we are in situations that have their own rules and laws, and that we must follow these rules and laws whether we like it or not, and whether we know about them or not. Nature is not a mother we can go against for long before she proves her dominance over our lives and organizations. You can't fool Mother Nature, *but you can be fooled by Mother Nature.*

Sometimes we may feel that we are at the short end of Robert Frost's wonderfully clever prayer poem:

*Forgive, oh Lord
My little jokes on thee,
And I will forgive
Thy great big one on me.*

Organizational life can feel like order on top, and chaos and disorder underneath. So people go about their business, and yet there seems to be this demon in the basement that makes their best efforts go astray. We can feel a little like Frost's notion of a ironic Cosmic joke being played in which we are the simple pawns who get it in the neck for someone else's or something else's pleasure.

It can feel like that *when we don't know the causes in play*. From our point of view, we do our best -- what more can anyone ask? -- but then "puff," we're in trouble. What the heck is going on?

When we come to understand the true causes we begin to see that there is both rhyme and reason in the events that occur. What we thought was chaos and disorder transforms itself into clarity and order. We can see how the path of least resistance has led us to places we didn't want to be. We can also understand how to change the path of least resistance so that it leads us to where we do want to be.

In this book, we're not talking theory, but practice based on principles. The principles are from nature. Why try to fool Mother Nature when you can create a strategic alliance with her? She's a good lady to have on your side.

All the people within your organization are in the same boat, which is traveling along the path of least resistance. The more people within the organization who understand the principles in this book, the better. But if even one person gets it -- you, for example -- there can be quite a change that can happen for the entire company.

This is a hands-on book for hands-on managers who face the real-world challenges, day in and day out. It's for senior managers who are faced with business strategy and overall direction of the company, as well as for middle-managers who face the tasks of getting the company where it is trying to go. It's for project managers who create products and systems that fuel the fire, and people who have the fiduciary responsibilities who make the money aspects of the organization work. When we have insight about the path of least resistance, we can redesign our organizations so that they work better than ever before.

Three Insights

This book is based on three insights that are the fundamental principles of the path of least resistance. By understanding and working with these principles, we can learn to master the management of our organizations and personal and professional situations.

***The first insight is that energy moves along
the path of least resistance.***

Our organizations move along this path, as do our personal and professional lives. Any changes we attempt to make that do not take the path of least resistance into account, and inadvertently violate the path of least resistance will not work. And this is the major reason that change effort after change effort often doesn't work over time. The changes might be excellent in and of themselves. But they can be imposed on an organization against the path of least resistance, and, consequently, they fail again and again. In those cases, the path of least resistance is to resist the change.

The second insight is just as fundamental. It is:

***The underlying structure of anything
will determine its path of least resistance.***

The topography in the old West determined the route the bison chose. Had the topography been different, they would have walked along a different path. The path of least resistance does not come into being arbitrarily. Instead, it is forged by an underlying structure.

Structure determines the path of least resistance, and organizations are subject to inescapable structural laws that govern their behavior. Much of this book takes into account the laws and principles of structure so we can understand why an organization can move from this business strategy to that, from this management approach to that, from this marketing approach to that. Through our study of structure, we can understand why some organizations perform like high performance race cars, and some perform like low-tech rocking chairs.

The third insight provides us with hope and self-determination. It is:

***We can determine the path of least resistance
by creating new structures.***

Just as the Army Corps of Engineers can change a riverbed, and thereby change the flow of water, we can change the underlying structures of our organizations, and even of our lives. A change of structure leads to a change of the path of least resistance.

We can redesign our organizations so that path of least resistance begins to flow in the direction in which we want it to go. But it takes work to learn how to do this. Like many things in life, often the principles are easier to talk about than they are to implement. Redesigning the organization is at least a two-step process, *understanding* first, *application* second. The application requires us to be diligent, rigorous, thoughtful, honest, disciplined, and creative. It's not an easy path, but it is the best one for the organization and the men and women within the organization. *But without the first step -- understanding -- the second step is impossible.* Learn these lessons well, and you will stack the cards in your favor.

"Captain, I cannot break the laws of structure."

The designer of the high performance racing car must take the laws of physics into account in his or her work, as must the designer of low-tech rocking chairs. As *Star Trek's* Scottie has said, "Captain, I cannot break the laws of physics!" Nor can we break the laws of structure when we shift into design mode. If we are to redesign our organizations for success, we must know the inescapable structural laws that rule them, not to overcome these laws, but to work with them.

This book introduces you to nine inescapable laws of organizational structure. Each one provides us with essential insights that we can use to understand our current situations and redesign them. Since we cannot break the laws of organizational structure, our approach is to be sensitive to the workings of structure and the power of the path of least resistance. That way you can go far beyond the points you have been able to go in the past, to the achievement of your highest aspirations.

There is a group of organizations that have used a structural approach for years in building their organization. These organizations represent models that we can look to in learning the practical lessons in this book. Most of the ones I will write about are business organizations, but we will also hear from governmental organizations, public service organizations, educational organizations, and religious organizations that are using a structural approach, all with great success. These organizations illustrate the fact that the path of least resistance can be consciously formed when we understand the structural principles involved.

The three insights -- (1) energy moves along the path of least resistance, (2) an underlying structure determines the path of least resistance, and (3) we can change the underlying structure and redirect the path of least resistance -- form the basis of true organizational and managerial mastery. The first two insights have to do with knowledge and background. If these were the only two principles involved, all we could do is understand why things were the ways they were, but we couldn't do much with that knowledge, except be philosophical when things go wrong. It's the third insight that enables us to redesign the organization, and have the redesign lead to real and lasting success.

So this book is like a design book in which we get knowledge about structure so we can use it in our redesign work. Turning principles into something you can use is the book's aim, so we can find our own path leading to the successful achievement of our dreams.

Creating What You Want

One of the major goals of this book is to help you create the organization you want. To do that, we need to understand at least two types of things.

First, how the path of least resistance is formed by the underlying structure we are in. So, we need to know something about the principles of structure. What we will learn is the actual structural reasons for oscillation and for advancement, and why they are so different. The second thing we need to learn is how to use our new-found knowledge about structure to design or redesign our organizations so they will produce the level of accomplishment and experience we want.

What you don't need is yet another business book telling you about techniques you can't actually use in your own organization. The organization will reject these new techniques, no matter how good they are, like a body rejecting an implanted organ. You need to know how to manage a structural change so that you can reroute the path of least resistance so that it leads to accomplishment and advancement. Then the techniques and processes you adopt will work to build the organization's pattern of success.

Composing the Organization

Imagine that an organization could be constructed like a great piece of orchestral music. What would it be like? It would have primary themes and secondary themes that are expressed throughout the organization. It would have accompaniment that supported the theme. All the members of the organization would be working together, playing their part and performing their unique role so that everyone else's part is supported. Leadership would be coordinating all the activities so they fall into place. And the design - the musical score - gives everyone exactly what he or she need to understand how it all fits together.

Can managers function in a similar way to composers, conductors, and musicians? Yes. But for this metaphor to be useful, we need it to be more actual than symbolic. When managers access the type of skills and insights that the music makers need in their profession, they can put into their organization a world-class level of performance worthy of the Boston Symphony or the New York Philharmonic.

This book has two dimensions that are inextricably tied together and give you a type of compositional technique that you can use in your organization: *structural insights* and *design tools*. The design tools include a major technique that we have been using with great success in our client's companies for over the past fifteen years. It is called *Structural Tension Charting*. This technique is the closest thing I know to a real compositional process. Using this process, we first develop main themes, and then we create important details that support the themes. Through this process, we are able to engineer a path of least resistance that leads directly to the successful achievement of our goals.

Structural Dynamics

This book refers to the work I have developed over the past twenty years called Structural Dynamics. It is the study of how structure works within nature, within people, within personal relationships, and within organizations. Organizations are a structural phenomenon as much as anything else, and unless we understand how and why they work as structure, we will not be able to change them in predictable ways. Our attempts to improve them will fail in the end, and we will have created a host of unintended consequences that we never wanted.

There are many people in this book who are identified as Structural Consultants, a term used to describe people who have had extensive training in the subject of structure, especially as it relates to organizations. These people are able to bring their experience and knowledge of structural issues to the attention of their client organizations. Structural Consulting is a very different method of working with an organization in that it analyzes the organization's structure first, and then works with those insights to help redesign the organization so that the path of least resistance can lead to true success. Because of the approach, change efforts are often very successful in enabling the organization to create the results it wants.

There are three parts in this book; the first is "The Path to Advancement," which focuses on key principles and techniques we can use in organizational design. The second part is "The Path of Oscillation," which helps us understand why our best efforts do not always succeed, and why success sometimes leads to new problems and reversals as a product of bad structure. The third part of the book is "Elements of Design (Moving from a Rocking Chair to a Ferrari)." This part, as it sounds, helps us change the path of least resistance from oscillating to advancing structures. Each part builds on the next, and gives us a blueprint for building the most successful organizations possible, not only in business terms, but also in human terms.

The Great Possibilities

There are great possibilities for the organization to be transformed-- to begin anew -- no matter what the past has been, to re-create itself. Organizations can go beyond the inevitability that the future must be an extension of the past.

The principle that we are talking about is sometimes known as *transcendence*, which is the ability to start over again and be given a second chance. Within our own lives, we can be the subject of this principle and turn over a new leaf. Organizations can benefit from the same principle, redesign their fundamental structures, and reroute the path of least resistance. And my hope is that this book can make this principle of transcendence come alive in your organization in such a way that you and your colleagues can redesign the ways you work together, think together, and create together -- so you can begin anew, learning the lessons of the past, but able to turn the page to new possibilities that may have been unimagined before now.

The Path Of Least Resistance For Managers

The Path To Advancement

Chapter 1	An Organization's Structure: The Path to Success or Failure
Chapter 2	Structural Tension: The Secret of Your Success
Chapter 3	Structural Tension Charting: The Key to Organizational Design
Chapter 4	Telescoping: Creating Organizational Counterpoint
Chapter 5	Checklists: Refining the Chart

The Path Of Oscillation

Chapter 6	Structural Conflict: Why Organizations Oscillate
Chapter 7	The Problem With Problem Solving
Chapter 8	Structural Conflicts of the Rich and Famous
Chapter 9	How To Address Structural Conflicts: The Key To Structural Redesign

Elements Of Design

Chapter 10	Purpose: What Unifies The Organization
Chapter 11	Business Strategy: The Path Of Least Resistance To Our Purpose
Chapter 12	Frames: The Best Way To See Reality
Chapter 13	Discovering Our True Vision
Chapter 14	The Power Of Shared Structural Tension
Chapter 15	Organizational Greatness: Building On Structural Tension

Robert Fritz is also the author of...

- THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE – "Learning To Become The Creative Force In Your Own Life " (best-seller)
- CREATING – guiding principles to help you create a work of art...or a deeply satisfying life
- CORPORATE TIDES – "The Inescapable Laws Of Organizational Structure"

This prologue is available in .pdf format (which is read on Adobe Acrobat Reader and other Acrobat programs), for forwarding to associates via e-mail.

**"The Path Of Least Resistance For Managers"
ships within 24 hours from Amazon.com,
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MarketPower's services incorporate Robert Fritz' work, including Structural Dynamics strategic action planning and consulting for companies, departments, or programs...and Organizational Technologies For Creating tactical training. For more information, please contact Joel Alpert at 404.636.5635 or joel@MarketPowerOnline.com