This paper is about producing change in training equipment, methods, or course structure in Australian obedience clubs. The paper was stimulated by the despair of large numbers of Canine Good Citizens Instructor Course participants in 1996, who kept saying things like *"That's a great training method, but I could never get it adopted at my club..."*

This paper aims to provide an understanding of why obedience clubs are sometimes resistant to new methods, and to give a number of suggestions for overcoming resistance and producing positive change. Three sources were used:

1) The literature on organisational change
2) Interviews with Chief or Senior Instructors from a number of obedience clubs including three that have switched to entirely positive methods
3) Experience at my own club.

**Why people resist change**
The organisational change literature lists a number of reasons that people may resist changes at work. One of the most common is **fear**. People fear everything from loss of their job to reduced status, competence, or expertise when new work methods or structures are introduced. People also generally prefer certainty to uncertainty, and change brings **uncertainty**.

When things are changing, we don't know in advance exactly what will happen. Most of us go through large sections of our lives on autopilot. This makes things easier, as the same routines can be enacted again and again without much thought. Change requires thought and effort to deal with uncertainty and build up new routines, and most of us would prefer not to make the effort unless there's the prospect of a substantial payoff at the end.

Another reason for resistance is **psychological reactance**. This is a well-documented tendency to want to feel in control and to have choices, and to strike back when control is threatened. When freedom of choice is taken away by unilaterally imposed change ("You MUST do it this way."), people resist even a change they might otherwise agree with, just because it was imposed on them.

**Misunderstanding** is another reason for resisting change. People who are worried about a change are probably not at the top of their form in terms of listening, so they often misunderstand what is being proposed and take exception to it. The reason most of us would give for our own resistance is **honest disagreement**. We just don't think the change is necessary or wise. Finally, people resist change if it represents too big a **change in their self-concept**, and is a threat to their core identity.

Some of the reasons that obedience instructors gave for resistance to new training methods come from the above categories, but some are unique enough to discuss separately. The following appear to be common reasons for resistance to gentle methods in clubs:

- Personality clashes and cliques within the club, meaning that some people wouldn't agree with certain others over something as obvious as the fact that rain is wet!
- The club's organizational structure. Some clubs concentrate tremendous power in a chief instructor or training committee. If this group is made up of old-school members, change is very difficult. Other clubs are more democratic, which can also be a problem because the majority is often apathetic, relatively uneducated, or satisfied with the status quo. In some clubs, a change in structure or the election of a new training committee may be very helpful in producing change.
- Excessive commitment to the methods originally learned. There is an air of superstitious reverence for the "*magic*" methods passed down by oral tradition. This is can be a plus for gentle methods advocates, as new handlers easily accept a positive reinforcement method if that is what they encounter first.
- Limited hands-on experience. Most amateur instructors have trained only one or two dogs. They haven't needed to think broadly or experiment with many methods to cope with a variety of problems and animals. The feeling seems to be that if a method worked for his or her dog, it should work for everyone's. Often people who go on to become instructors have trained dogs from relatively easy and cooperative breeds (Golden Retrievers, Border Collies), and/or breeds that tend to have hard characters (German Shepherd Dogs) and so hold up well to traditional jerk and pull training.
- Fear of failure. Experienced instructors KNOW the old familiar methods, but aren't sure if they can understand, teach, or effectively implement a new method. For instance, a 70-year-old instructor in our club resisted games, because she didn't know any or how to run them. Some older instructors have a lot of their time, effort, self-esteem, and identity wrapped up in dog training, being retired or not having a career.
  This means that anything that threatens their competence in regard to obedience teaching will be terrifically upsetting. Most people have a tremendous fear of public speaking. Volunteer instructors have overcome this at least partially by relying on habitual routines to fill class time (forward, right about turn, halt, forward, etc.). When you ask them to stop paddock bashing and teach heeling two or three steps at a time, they immediately worry about what they will say and do for the rest of the class time, and worry about looking foolish.
- Lack of knowledge of dog behaviour. Some instructors don't understand the underlying principles of dog training and dog behaviour. Three of my first five interviewees lamented that, *"Resisters don't READ!"* They also don't attend seminars. In the absence of a conceptual framework for how dogs learn, these people are unable to evaluate either old or new methods logically.
- A search for exceptions to the rule. When required to try a new method, people are especially vigilant for the one dog on which the method doesn't seem to work. ("We CAN'T teach drop with a food lure, because I've got a dog in my class who doesn't care about food.") Having proven to themselves that the method doesn't work 100% of time, these instructors feel justified in rejecting it entirely.
- Moral objections. Some well-intentioned instructors oppose some newer methods because they believe the use of food is somehow immoral, "cheating," or "too easy." Dogs are supposed to work out of love of the handler, not for cookies. These people speak disparagingly about "bribery." Note that it is in the nature of values and moral principles that THEY ARE NOT NEGOTIABLE.
- *"If it ain't broke, don't fix it."* Existing methods are no doubt having some success in producing dogs that are more obedient than they were, and at least some handlers who go on to trialling. Those who leave the club because they are not successful or object to treating their dogs harshly usually disappear quietly without providing any feedback about their concerns.

**Producing Change**

The organisational change literature suggests many ways to facilitate change (see Table 1), while the Chief Instructors I interviewed had their own ideas. One interviewee said, *"First be a successful trialler yourself, to gain credibility for your proposed changes."* A formal credential like Canine Good Citizen Instructor might also add to your credibility.

Change choices seem to be:

1) To confront the status quo head on, try to convince people that your methods are better, and that they should change immediately. While some people have had success with this approach, it often generates a great deal of resistance, distress, and negative feelings, and instructors belonging to the *"losing"* side often leave the club. This approach explicitly tells people that what they have been doing for years is WRONG, and almost anyone will become defensive when on the receiving end of an attack like this. If your side loses, you may feel you have to leave, or you may have strengthened and consolidated the opposition to subsequent change efforts.
2) To gently and gradually build an increasingly large coalition for change, converting rather than alienating some of those who previously disagreed. This bit-by-bit process can take three to five years, but eventually change "just happens" with minimal or no fireworks. Some specific ideas for making a gradual change appear below.

Lack of knowledge suggests that education about canine learning might increase acceptance of new methods. Our club spent hundreds of dollars acquiring a training library, and as the instigator of the idea, I got to pick the books! Instructors are encouraged to borrow and read the books, and new instructor trainees are usually quite keen to read the entire library. Keilor (a dog club in Melbourne) did the same.

If resistant instructors don't go to seminars, one can bring seminars to them. New ideas are often more palatable from outsiders, so even though pro-change club members may be equally knowledgeable, it pays to bring in outside speakers.

Remember "*A prophet has no honour in his own count*ry." Keilor had great success bringing in Terry Ryan and Karen Damiani to do seminars. Demonstrations and workshops are particularly powerful because instructors can see how quickly the new methods work, and see difficult dogs turned around.

Don't just talk about how to do things differently -- go through the whole teaching-learning cycle. TELL them, then SHOW them, then give them a chance to TRY IT OUT (and provide reinforcement for any progress at all).

The more seminars, the better. We have had Cathy Slot (from the Agility Dog Association of Australia) in to speak about clicker training, and a number of our instructors have done Kerrie Haynes-Lovell's (the polar bear trainer from Sea World and chief instructor at Amigos Animal Actors) trick training course.
I've been running a tricks and games class this year, hoping that instructors with retired dogs would join in and learn about clicker training, and would become comfortable with luring, targeting, and the concept of bridging before they were asked to use these ideas in their own teaching.

Come to think of it, tricks or musical freestyle might be a good place to start to introduce positive methods, because it's less **serious** than competitive obedience. People are less likely to take it personally and feel the need to resort to compulsion if they are teaching a dog to roll over or walk backwards than if they are teaching it to sit.

In the past two years, we've also initiated a two-day seminar on canine behaviour and learning. We charge the public (class members, potential future instructors, vet nurses, etc.) to attend, but the seminar is free to existing instructors. It's a nice way to say thank you to volunteers for their effort, it reminds instructors who already lean towards gentle methods why they feel that way and increases their confidence in explaining things to others, and it has probably changed a few minds among instructors who were doubters before.

If you can't convert the leadership of your Club to engage in a "*top – down*" change, you can try to create additional constituencies favouring change in a "*bottom – up*" approach. We had several such constituencies in our club: Pet Course handlers who have come up through our Puppy Kindy, Puppy Kindy instructors, and recently trained instructors.

It seems pretty obvious that one will use food rather than force in puppy kindy with dogs only 2-4 months old. So of course that's what we do. A side effect is that when puppy handlers graduate to Pet Course, they are already committed to gentle methods and most choose not to use check collars. Puppy instructors become better at using food and thus more likely to use it in their adult dog classes as well. All new instructors for the past five years at our club have been exposed to learning principles and a wide variety of methods -- because I teach the new instructor course.

The vast majority of these graduates are quite receptive to more gentle method. So-- get involved with your club's puppy kindy or volunteer to teach part or all of your club's new instructor program. All three of the clubs I surveyed who had successfully changed to positive methods said they'd started with puppy classes first.

An "objective" source of persuasion that change is necessary is customer surveys. Feedback that students are not getting what they want may stimulate change. Few clubs do 'end-of-course' surveys or phone follow-ups of obedience class dropouts. If clubs collected this information, they might learn more about the problems with the present program, and may come to realise that the old ways aren't perfect. They might possibly even learn than not everyone who comes to beginner training is intending to trial their dogs!

People seem to update their methods when exposed, gently, to alternatives. One club I talked to said that methods were not cast in concrete, and that instructors observed each other and copied new ideas or methods that they liked. There was no compulsion to change, so psychological reactance wasn't a problem. You could begin by training your own dog with new methods, and if you have success, others will become interested in what you are doing and ask you to show them. Some members of my club have attended Cathy Slot's clicker agility classes, while some at Keilor took their problem dogs to Karen Damiani and got results impressive enough to change their outlook completely.

Another way to create exposure to alternatives is to run an "*experimental*" or "*pilot"* course using new methods. This has the advantage of allowing people to SEE it work before making a commitment, and it is easier to get permission for an experiment than for across-the-board changes. My club was relatively traditional, but I had no trouble teaching a Canine Good Citizen's course in 1997 and later an "*experimental gentle-methods Pet Course*."

This was partly to build up my understanding of how an alternative to traditional methods would operate - I needed to have more confidence before pushing for widespread adoption. However, I had no shortage of experienced instructors volunteering to serve as assistants or coming by to watch us ("*What IS she doing with chairs on the field?*").

We have just finished a six-month task force to look into Pet Course, which culminated in two more experimental pet courses being run. With what we have learned from these courses, we are now ready to propose changes to the program that will be binding on all instructors. The great thing is that several other instructors are now choosing to do the very things we are about to codify! We are more confident in which methods we want to use, and will be able to train instructors much more specifically in what we want them to do. I believe that this specificity will be helpful in overcoming people's fear of not knowing exactly what to do to fill 45 minutes of class time.

Appeal to higher values and principles. If people can agree that they want training to be as unstressful on the dog as possible, and that they don't want to jeopardise the dog-handler relationship, then yelling and yanking become less acceptable. Ask them:

- Is it fair to punish a dog before it could possibly know what you want or what is "*wrong*"?
- Is it ethical to impose methods on others that probably NONE of them would use on their own new puppy if they had one?

Go for "small wins." Change one thing at a time, easy things first. Get some runs on the board to build momentum for the bigger changes. One Chief Instructor I interviewed used compromise to get a foot in the door - adding games, but agreeing that they could go late in sessions after "*real training.*"

We changed to the lure drop six years ago, because there was fairly widespread dissatisfaction with the running drop method and most people could be convinced it was unnecessarily rough. Then we started stocking halters and half-check collars along with check chains, and giving handlers a choice of equipment. People were unsure about head halters at first, but they've seen good results on out-of-control dogs, and now nearly everyone will refer problem dogs for halters. The emphasis throughout the club is shifting to providing the equipment and method individual dogs need rather than insisting that all MUST be trained with identical equipment and methods.

I'm more and more convinced that a gradual and tactful approach to change is possible and less destructive than a war between factions. There may still be some hurt feelings and a few people who resign, but these problems should be much smaller than with a sudden frontal attack. Appendix A explains force field analysis, which is a technique a pro-change group can use to better understand their resources and potential resources for change, and also to anticipate and understand the resistance they may encounter. Once resistance is understood, creative ways of dealing with it may be found.

Beware that in a full-on debate, the sides tend to get farther apart rather than closer. Still, there may be times you have to argue, or at the very least explain your position or counter others' arguments cogently. Thus, it is worth thinking through the merits of your position and how you can make your points to others clearly. Examples follow:

'*What about dogs that won't work for food?*' While I haven't tried this method yet, though I've recommended it several times since the Dunbar seminar in February. Ian Dunbar says that for one week, every morsel that goes in the dog's mouth must be hand fed. There is no free-choice feeding. He swears that after a week of hand feeding, all dogs will work for food.

What if they say, "*But you can't use food in the ring!*" Neither can you use much voice or any checking, their preferred teaching methods! We are taking about how to <u>teach</u> new behaviours. Voice, checks, and food can all be greatly reduced as behaviours are better learned.

In my less tactful moments, I've attacked ritualistic devotion to "*time tested methods*" with the following analogy: Would you prefer that your doctor use methods learned years ago from her grandfather ("*Have a slug of whisky and bite this bullet while I take out your appendix.*"), or would you rather she use the latest medical techniques and drugs? Like medicine, dog training has advanced in the last 50 years!

Did you ever notice that there's no worldwide movement or association of jerk and pull trainers? No forum where people get together to tell each other what great new ideas they've had for using electric-collars, check chains, or yelling "*Bah*!" at their dogs? On the other hand, the Association of Pet Dog Trainers is thriving and drawing huge crowds to their events, both internationally and domestically.

I've been using Karen Pryor's "*training game*" since first seeing it in a Terry Ryan seminar six years ago. It's a very powerful way to show instructors how hard it is for the dog to figure out what you mean. This may generate some sympathy for showing the dog what you DO want by luring or targeting, and liberal use of rewards to keep the animal trying.

Another approach (which I haven't tried because it's just occurred to me) is to play the training game a second time, but instead of using a click and treat to mean "*you're getting warmer*," yell '*Bah!*' and take a dollar away from the trainee for each move in the wrong direction. I suspect you'd begin to see intense frustration, greatly reduced effort, and maybe even aggression toward the trainer. This is, after all, what can happen with traditional punishment oriented training.

In conclusion, it probably won't be easy to change a club with decades of history of doing things essentially the same way. It won't always be possible. But with some thought, and a lot of time and dedication, it is more likely than you might think.

Table 1

**Tips for Producing Change**
- Ease misperceptions
  *(Explain it again, in different words, get someone else to explain it.)*
- Create a safety net so individual failure is less likely
  *(Run training sessions for instructors, buy everyone a copy of 'Beyond Block Heeling')*
- Consider a fall-back position for those who can't cope
  *(Monday classes will continue to teach by the traditional method, Wednesday classes will use new methods.)*
- Help others experience the need for change
  *(Do a customer satisfaction or expectation survey.)*
- Build a pro-change power base of critical mass
  *(Don't propose a change until you've lined up some support for it, have several committed and reasonably high status people on side.)*
- Change the structure  *(From all-powerful Chief Instructor to Training Committee, or the reverse.)*
- Use participation
  *(Set up a study committee including some resisters and some forward thinkers, let everyone have their say, learn from the protests.)*
- Offer rewards
  *(Tell people what's in it for them. Perhaps those who cooperate get subsidised to go to a course or some other reward.)*
- Exclude OR involve resisters
  *(Disable and isolate extreme resisters, involve others by cooperation/participation.)*

- Spread change over time
  *(Go for small wins and less threatening modifications at first.)*
- Avoid we-they mentality
  *(Emphasize shared superordinate goals - helping handlers train their dogs effectively with as little stress as possible, attracting new members/workers to the Club, etc.)*
- Use contagion/ try pilot programs
  *(Ask for permission to try new methods on a limited, experimental basis, then document and share successes.)*
- Education
  *(Start a library, bring in speakers, and send people to seminars and workshops.)*
- Accept and honour valid resistance
  *(Be polite no matter what, accept good arguments.)*
- Point to external conditions, which preclude maintenance of status quo
  *(Enlist Council to prod changes, point to newspaper and legislative concerns about dogs which are not being addressed by the present instructional program.)*
- Show committed leadership
  *(Be willing to make a huge effort yourself, keep spreading the message all the time.)*
- Provide a clear, written description of the desired change but be willing to negotiate
  *(Put the proposal in writing to minimize misunderstanding - but as a negotiable draft to prevent reactance.)*
- Use force field analysis to understand what you are up against and plan a course of action
- Start with puppy kindy and/or tricks classes
- Become involved in instructor training
- Build your credibility and that of your methods
  *Be a successful trialler; solve other's problems with your methods.)*
- Persist!

Appendix A
**Force Field Analysis**

Force field analysis is a technique for understanding the forces for and against change. It starts from the belief that the status quo is a state of dynamic equilibrium, in which the forces for change are counterbalanced by the forces against change (see figure below).

To produce change, one could increase the forces for change - push and argue harder. However, this often causes the forces against change to push back harder in response (reactance). Another approach is to defuse the forces against change, and then the existing level of forces for change will be strong enough to shift the system toward the desired state. For instance, if people resist out of fear or misunderstanding, try to reduce their resistance by clarifying, teaching, communicating, demonstrating, and providing a safety net during the change.



**Forces for Change**   **Forces Against Change**

**Status Quo**   **Desired State**
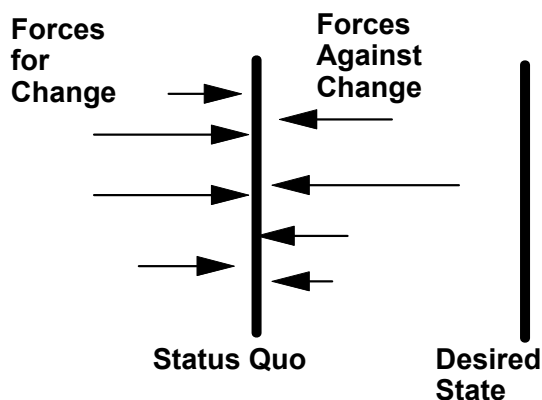
A pro-change group can use force field analysis to understand what they are up against and plan how to deal with it by following these steps:

1. List all the forces for change. Forces can be arguments, people, data, traditions, external constraints and pressures, resources, etc. Forces can be depicted by lines of differing length or thickness to indicate their potency.
2. List all the forces against change. Think hard. Put yourself in their shoes.
3. Brainstorm many actions to reduce forces against change.
4. Brainstorm many actions to increase forces for change.
5. Assess the feasibility of each action. Which may backfire and increase resistance?
6. Prioritize actions.
7. Build a plan from the ranking of actions.
8. Develop a timetable for the plan; allocate responsibilities, and DO IT!