likely they are to feel that the change is something they are helping to create. In addition to increasing motivation, participation and involvement can also produce better decisions because of the wider input and can help to sustain the change once implemented because of a greater sense of ownership.

The classic study by Coch and French (1948) demonstrated that workers are much more accepting of a change in work practices when they are involved in the planning of the change (Research report 12.1).

Research report 12.1 *Effect of group participation on resistance to change*

Coch, L. and French, J.R. (1948) Overcoming resistance to change, *Human Relations*, 1(4): 512–32.

Coch and French designed one of the first experiments to explore the effect of group participation on resistance to change. They observed, in the Harwood Manufacturing Company, that changing people's jobs and rates of pay often led to drops in performance and higher levels of grievances, aggression and labour turnover.

They examined the effect of two different ways of including workers in the design of the change. The first involved participation through representation and the second involved the participation of the whole group. The effects of these two methods were compared with the outcome of the normal procedure for introducing change.

The normal way of introducing change was for management to define the new job and then set the new rate of pay before calling a meeting to inform the workers why the change was necessary (a response to competitive pressures) and what it would involve. Questions were answered before the meeting was closed.

The first experimental treatment (participation through representation) involved a group meeting with all operators before any changes had been designed. Managers explained the need for change and encouraged discussion before proposing a six-stage process that involved studying the job as it was being done, eliminating all unnecessary work, training representative operators in the new methods, setting the new piece rates using time studies of these operators, explaining the new job and pay rates to all operators and, finally, involving the representatives in training all the other operators. Coch and French report that this approach was successful and that the representatives referred to 'our job' and 'our rate'. The second experimental treatment was applied to two groups. It was similar to the first but involved all operators rather than just representatives.

Results

There was little improvement in the performance of the control group, where change had been introduced in the normal way, and resistance to the change developed almost immediately. However, there was significant improvement in the performance of both experimental groups – participation through representation and participation of the whole group – and the changes were introduced without any significant resistance. The rate of performance improvement was higher when all operators participated in designing the change.

Coch and French conducted a second experiment 10 weeks after the control group involved in the first experiment had been dispersed to other jobs in the company. The members of the original group were brought together again and transferred to a new job using the total participation procedure – no reference was made to their previous behaviour on being transferred. The results were in sharp contrast to the results when they had been moved to new work using the company's normal procedure. Performance improved and there was no resistance.

The first set of experiments indicated that:

- performance improvement was directly proportional to the amount of participation
- the rate of turnover and aggression was inversely proportional to the amount of participation.

The second experiment with members of the original control group suggested that the results depended on the experimental treatment (amount of participation) rather than personality factors or differences in skill level.

IV

Coch and French's findings suggested that participation led to the acceptance of new practices because it encouraged the group to 'own' them as a group goal. This ownership offered the bonus of new group norms that helped to implement and sustain the changes.

Lines (2004) conducted a study of change management in a national telecommunications firm that also demonstrates a link between participation and the acceptance of change. The findings indicated a strong positive relationship between participation, goal achievement and organizational commitment and a strong negative relationship between participation and resistance.

Involvement can be encouraged at any stage of the change process and can include all of a target group or only a representative sample. Organizational members might be invited to participate in the initial diagnosis of the problem, the development of solutions and the planning of implementation strategies, in the actual implementation of the change plan and/or in the evaluation of the effectiveness of the change. Some of these possibilities will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 24 when different types of intervention are considered.

Some managers have an ideological commitment to participation and involvement, whereas others feel that it threatens their power and authority and is almost always a mistake. Kotter and Schlesinger (1979) maintain that both attitudes can lead to problems because neither is realistic. They argue that where change initiators do not have all the information they need to design and implement a change, or when they need the wholehearted commitment of the change target, involving others can make good sense. However, involvement does have some costs. It can be time-consuming and, if those who are involved have less technical expertise than those leading the change, it can result in a change plan that is not as good as it might have been. Factors that can affect the decision to involve others are discussed in Chapter 15.

Facilitation and support

Kotter and Schlesinger (1979) suggest that when fear and anxiety lie at the heart of resistance, an effective approach to motivating change is to offer facilitation and support. They suggest that this might involve the provision of training in new skills, giving time off after a demanding period, or simply listening and providing emotional support.

Nadler (1993) refers to the need to provide time and opportunity for people to disengage from the current state. This can be especially helpful when they feel a sense of loss associated with the letting go of something they value or feel is an important part of their individual or group identity. He also refers to the value of group sessions that provide organizational members with the opportunity to share their concerns about the change. However, he acknowledges the possibility that such sessions might also have the effect of increasing rather than reducing resistance by, for example, becoming an opportunity to simply air grievances.

Ceremonies and rituals that mark transitions can also help people to let go of the past and begin to think constructively about the future. When staff had to transfer to new roles following the closure of an old generating plant at a large UK power station, they made a coffin that they paraded around the plant before burning it in the furnace. After work, they all went out for a meal together to talk about old times. It was a bit like a funeral followed by a wake. Rituals can help people manage the sense of loss that is often associated with change. They can also be used to