Toolkit Page 108 Large Systems Change

Here are brief descriptions of a few popular large systems change approaches. By the way, large systems change usually refers to approaches that "get the whole system in the room." In other words, these approaches involve multiple levels and a cross section of the organization.

I include:

- Future Search
- The Conference Model
- Real Time Strategic Change (aka Whole Scale Change)
- "What If?" Scenarios

FUTURE SEARCH

Future Search is a process that can build common ground and shared vision among various groups. It was developed by Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff.

In 2 1/2 days a group can move from In the Dark through the getting Started Stage. (See the Cycle of Change.)

During a Future Search conference, representatives from all key stakeholder groups gather to discuss the future of the organization. (They suggest a maximum of seventy people.) Before discussing the future, participants examine the past and the current situations. In a typical conference, large sheets of paper might be placed on the walls indicating three decades, say the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, with each decade divided into three parts: personal reflections, organizational history, and the larger world. Participants write their recollections of significant events in each of these areas over the past thirty years. Since all are at the wall at the same time, people rub shoulders, chat, and of course read what others have written.

After the writing ends, people begin to look at themes within each category and trends that continue from decade to decade. More experienced staff recall the history of the organization and the pressures they faced over the years. Newer staff learn about critical events that occurred before they arrived. People begin to see that they are all in this together. They often realize that they share considerable common ground. All begin to see the trends that may shape their future.

Later, people divide into their respective groups within the organization to identify their "proudest prouds" and "sorriest sorries." They present these lists to the full group. Self-disclosure is a key factor in building trust. When a department *admits* that it has been less than responsive over the years, some are relieved, while others are often surprised that the department seems to understand the impact it has had on the rest of the organization.

Future Search continues with many other activities that build a common understanding of the organization. Based on this knowledge, people meet in mixed groups to develop visions for a preferred future.

Future Search addresses the need to build a common base before proceeding around the change cycle. It lets all move along the cycle together. Future Search can take an organization from Random Incidents through Recognition to Initial Actions.

A typical Future Search lasts three days. Compared with the difficulty many organizations have in making any progress at all along the cycle, moving from Random Incidents to Initial Actions in that short a time may seem a miracle. The secret, of course, is that this technique builds trust first. Taking time to build the foundation allows future activities to move much more quickly.

Using Future Search

You need someone who is experienced in Future Search to help you plan and facilitate this event. There are many consultants working inside organizations as well as external consultants who can lead these events. For more information on Future Search visit:

www.**futuresearch**.net. And I encourage you to read *Future Search: An Action Guide to Finding Common Ground in Organizations and Communities, by Marvin* Weisbord and Sandra Janoff.

THE CONFERENCE MODEL

Dick and Emily Axelrod developed a change model that builds on Future Search and extends the process up to Roll Out on the Cycle of Change. They create planning teams that are encouraged to steal ideas from each other, so that at the end of the day it is hard to tell who came up with what idea. It is a great way to create ownership.

You can learn more about this (and their latest thinking) at **http://www.axelrodgroup.com/.** I can also highly recommend Dick's book, *Terms of Engagement*. Be sure to get the 2010 edition.

REAL TIME STRATEGIC CHANGE (ALSO KNOWN AS WHOLE SCALE CHANGE)

With proper planning, Real Time Strategic Change or Whole Scale Change, it is possible to move a critical mass of an organization from In the Dark through getting Started in a matter of days. (see the Cycle of Change)

The late Kathie Dannemiller, Robert Jacobs, and associates at Dannemiller-Tyson developed Real Time Strategic Change. It allows people to influence an existing vision and revise a strawman plan. Jacobs now offers this (and other approaches through his firm: www.windsofchangegroup.com. Dannemiller Tyson now calls their approach Whole Scale Change. You can contact them at: www.dannemillertyson.com.

Here's how it works:

The typical first step is to bring all key stakeholders together. These highly-structured meetings often involve a few hundred people. During the conference, speakers present background information to help increase recognition of the need for the change. They may call in experts as well as representatives from similar organizations to speak to the group.

People are placed at tables in "maxmix" (maximum mixture) groups. Each table represents a cross section of the organization. (Of course, people never sit with their bosses.) This almost guarantees fertile discussion as representatives from across the organization tackle critical problems.

A presentation is followed by question and answers. For example, suppose someone has just presented the reasons the organization must improve its distribution system. Each maxmix table would discuss three questions:

- What did we hear?
- What were our reactions?
- What questions of understanding do we have?

Some tables are called on to ask their questions of clarification. Speakers at the front table respond.

The same format is followed when the proposal for change is offered. A Planning team presents a clear proposal for action. In terms of the cycle of change, they offer a model that describes how the change would be integrated into the organization.

Making a strong statement is like pumping adrenaline into the meeting. People react. Some may love it. Some may hate it. Others may scratch their heads. But few are slack jawed and uninterested. Table groups are often asked:

- What makes you glad?
- What makes you mad?
- What would you add?

You'll note that these questions can get at Level 2 and Level 3 issues without ever putting people on the spot or calling it resistance.

The maxmix process allows people to voice their concerns. Since maxmix groups foster diversity of thought, presentations to the full group create a sense of common ground and direction.

The planning team often meets late into the night to revise their plan based on what they heard. The next day they propose the revisions to the group, and the dialogue continues.

How to Begin

You must use a facilitator skilled in this process for it to work effectively. Just the logistics alone of coordinating a participatory meeting for hundreds can be daunting. Please don't try this for this first time without expert help.

Here are two books that can provide a good foundation.

- Dannemiller Tyson Associates. *Whole Scale Change: Unleashing the Magic of Organizations*.
- Jacobs, Robert. *Real Time Strategic Change: How to Involve an Entire Organization in Fast and Far-Reaching Change*.

"WHAT IF?" SCENARIOS

This isn't a large systems change event as such since the meeting may only include dozens versus hundreds of people. It does involve multiple groups of stakeholders and gets people involved in the process in a deep and meaningful way.

"What If?" scenarios is a good tool to use where many departments or groups need to work together on a project. The What If" Scenario helps ensure that the project is completed on time and within budget.

At the beginning of the project, representatives from all the critical groups meet to:

1. Identify potential conflicts or trouble spots.
2. Mixed groups develop "what if?" strategies. What will we do if X happens? If Z occurs?
3. 3. Full group decides on strategies.

Often the depth of the resistance doesn't even become apparent to us until we are asked to take action. For example, an administrative unit within a government agency was considering ways to improve efficiency. Their customers began to demand faster response time. The department's manual systems were no match for a clientele used to the speed of fax and modem communications. Although they faced resistance during the early stages of planning, it wasn't until the group began suggesting specific strategies that the deepest resistance surfaced. People who had supported the early planning became suspicious of the very strategies they had been supporting. It was not that they had been holding out, waiting for the right time to disrupt progress, it was just that as they got closer to implementing plans, they discovered factors they felt they had to resist.

The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers developed this approach to get issues out on the table before they turn into conflicts. (What If? Scenario is my name for this process.) All players involved in a construction project come together to define what this temporary partnership will look like. They discuss how they will handle such issues as quality, completion dates, costs and cost overruns, safety, and paperwork.

They address things that could go wrong. This is a pretty easy task; everyone in the business knows where the hassles are. Then they devise strategies for dealing with these potential pitfalls. Think of these as the "What If?" scenarios.

Exploring what might happen is much safer than trying to tackle a problem when it is facing you. "What If?" scenarios allow you to step back and calmly play with possibilities without the risk.

Here are some things to consider:

1. If the groups have worked together before, identify projects where the groups were in conflict. If the groups are new, ask people to draw on their own experience to identify potential conflict over the change.

   Do not assign blame. The goal is to identify issues that could come up during the current change, not dissect the particular past events.

2. Form mixed groups with representatives from a cross-section of departments and levels of the organizations involved. Have those groups take on the issues identified in Step 1 and develop strategies to address these problems should they occur.

   Consider the five touchstones as you develop strategies. Groups should address the following questions:

   - How can we keep our focus on the goal if this issue occurs?
   - How will we summon the courage to stick with it, even if the going gets extremely tough?
   - What can we do to ensure mutual respect in the midst of this issue?
   - What can we do to ensure that all the critical issues get out on the table?
   - How can we stay relaxed in the midst of this conflict?
   - How can we promote the development of common values?

3. Subgroups report to the full group all questions, comments, and suggested changes.

4. The full group decides which of these strategies it can fully support.

 Rick uses his Change without Migraines™ to advise organizations on how to lead change effectively. He is author of many books including *Beyond the Wall of Resistance*. In 2009, he created the Change Management Open Source Project, a free resource for people interested in change in organizations. You can access the open source project as well as many free articles and tools from his web site: www.rickmaurer.com