

Leith's Guide to Large Group Interventions

How to use large group
interventions to address
complex strategic issues

By Jack Martin Leith

WHAT'S INSIDE THE GUIDE

Why more than 70% of all change programmes fail	Page 2
SLOW change	3
FAST change	3
Ten conditions for creating successful change	3
41 guiding principles for creating effective planning meetings	4
Large group intervention methods	7 to 9
Future Search, The Conference Model®, Search Conferences, Real Time Strategic Change, Open Space Technology	10 to 13
Other methods	14
More resources	15 to 19
About Jack Martin Leith	20

I wrote this guide in 1995, when Open Space Technology, Real Time Strategic Change and Future Search had been in existence for just 10 years.

Today, the world is a very different place, and my ideas about innovation and change have evolved. For example, I no longer talk about SLOW change and FAST change, and the three worldviews have become four.

In view of these and other developments, I had reservations about continuing to make the guide available.

However, the descriptions of the methods are still accurate, and I have decided to set my reservations aside.

I hope you will find the guide useful.

Jack Martin Leith
Bristol, United Kingdom
October 2012

TOWARDS A MORE EFFECTIVE WAY OF CREATING STRATEGIC CHANGE

Organisational change programmes are typically designed to:

- ▶ *Change the way people behave at work in order to improve performance.*
- ▶ *Implement a bold new strategy for turning the corporate vision into reality.*
- ▶ *Rethink corporate structure and redesign jobs.*
- ▶ *Integrate merged or acquired companies.*
- ▶ *Re-engineer business processes.*
- ▶ *Implement new IT systems..*
- ▶ *Increase the speed at which new products are developed and brought to market.*

Even though most change programmes are carefully planned – often with the help of experienced consultants – between 70% and 90% of them fail to achieve the desired results. Why is the failure rate so high?

The conventional approach to change has ten structural weaknesses

-1 Top management clings to the old model of leadership.

Senior managers continue to provide leadership in the form of solutions, instead of working to improve the organisation's capacity to adapt. This improved adaptability can only be achieved if the leaders change themselves before seeking to change the rest of the organisation.

-2 Change is imposed and driven by senior management.

By and large the planners of the change programme (typically senior management assisted by consultants) have the best of intentions when they insist that people implement their plan without modification. The implementers, on the other hand, usually want to adapt the plan to fit their individual situations. This can lead to an escalating pattern where the more the planners seek compliance, the more the implementers do their own thing, or do nothing – ultimately resulting in the failure of the programme.

-3 The change model is based on control and domination.

Fearing the unpredictable, chaotic nature of change and the threat of its unwanted consequences, managers employ pseudo-scientific change management techniques in a vain attempt to control the process and create predictable and measurable outcomes. But although managers can control micro-level changes, such as introducing new corporate stationery, at the macro level too many of the variables are beyond human control. Major change can no more be managed than the weather can be managed. Indeed, many major change programmes are little more than ritual rain dances that satisfy man's compelling need to take action in the face of a crisis. But whereas rain dances are harmless, many conventional change programmes have failure designed into them as they make no allowances for unanticipated developments.

-4 Stakeholder involvement is narrow.

Planners of conventional change programmes generally exclude the vast majority of internal stakeholders from the planning process. Also, they tend to ignore important external stakeholder groups such as suppliers, customers and the local community. The opportunity to create a more widely-shared vision of the future is therefore lost, and key stakeholders may fail to provide vitally-needed support.

-5 Awareness of current reality is limited.

As a consequence of failing to involve from the outset everyone who will be affected by the change, a dangerously incomplete picture of current reality is created. This is compounded by the fact that certain issues will be considered taboo and therefore

undiscussable. Wise strategic decisions are unlikely to be made when informed by such a limited information base.

-6 The focus is on identifying and solving problems.

Many models of organisational change are based on an elaboration of the problem solving model. Problem solving is about fixing things that have gone wrong, and the results tend to be incremental improvements rather than "order of magnitude" changes. Even if an organisation were to nail every one of its problems, this would not be enough for it to achieve its strategic objectives.

-7 The vision is shaped by an elite group of experts and senior managers.

The boss outlines his or her vision through a presentation. ("I have shared my vision, so now we have a shared vision.") Employees may buy into the vision but, after giving it more consideration, experience buyer's remorse and as a consequence withdraw their support.

-8 Linear thinking is used.

Linear thinking usually leads to ineffective change strategies, for two reasons. First, it produces a programme with a predetermined sequence of steps leading the organisation towards a fixed goal. Rarely are there any opportunities for the goal to be reviewed and, if necessary, redefined. However, in reality, changes in the internal and external operating environments may quickly render the original goal obsolete. The second reason is that the issue is not viewed in a broad enough context. If the complex web of causes and effects is not properly understood and delayed reactions are not taken into account, then there is a strong likelihood that the change programme will fail to achieve its objectives. In some cases it may set the organisation back even further.

-9 Change strategy is communicated by transmitting messages.

The communication method is one where messages are transmitted from the bosses to "the troops". The consequences are low commitment and missed opportunities.

-10 Planning and implementation are sequential.

Conventional strategic planning (plan then implement) requires the world to stand still while the planners do their work. Unfortunately the world keeps on turning and the planners never quite catch up.

The ten weaknesses add up to SLOW change

The consequences of the conventional approach to change are SLOW change:

- ▶ The change is *SLOW*.
- ▶ The change *LACKS AGREEMENT*, which means there's not enough commitment for the change to happen.
- ▶ The change is *OFF STRATEGY*. Results achieved are insufficient to position the organisation for sustained success.
- ▶ The change is "*WICKED*". The more things change, the more they remain the same. Transformational changes continue to be elusive and the organisation's capacity to adapt remains unchanged.

From SLOW change to FAST change

FAST change has the following characteristics:

- ▶ It is *FAST*.
- ▶ It has the *AGREEMENT* of everyone concerned. There is widespread commitment to making the change happen.
- ▶ It is *STRATEGIC*. The change effort results in new ways of doing business that position the entire organisation for sustainable success.

- It is *TRANSFORMATIONAL*. The new organisation is fundamentally different from the old one. Formerly intractable problems disappear, and breakthrough results are achieved. Once completed, the change benefits all stakeholders. And the organisation greatly expands its capacity to adapt.

Few people would disagree that change needs to be fast, agreed, strategic and transformational. But how can this be achieved?

FAST change becomes possible when the ten weaknesses listed on page 2 are translated into strengths, which then become a set of conditions for success.

Ten conditions for successful change

+1 Top management adopts a new model of leadership.

The organisation’s leaders acknowledge that significant change can only be achieved if they redefine their leadership purpose as improving the organisation’s capacity to adapt, and radically change their own assumptions, values, beliefs and behaviour before doing anything else.

+2 The need for change is self-determined, and the change process is self-managed.

Everyone realises for themselves that change is needed, by noticing the gap between current reality and the shared vision. They create strategies and action plans together, with each person taking responsibility for the successful implementation of these plans.

+3 The change model is based on trust and co-operation.

Control is replaced with trust, and domination with co-operation. Instead of trying to overpower the unseen forces of the natural world, people gain creative power by co-operating with them. People trust their own abilities and the ability of others to do the right thing when given sufficient information. And they trust that the process of change will take the organisation to wherever it needs to be, even if the destination is not the one they originally chose. Leaders still make interventions, but they are subtle and wise ones like those described in John Heider’s book, *The Tao of Leadership*. In this way people’s creativity is accessed and harnessed.

+4 There is broad stakeholder involvement.

Everyone with a stake in the future success of the organisation is actively and equally involved in the strategic planning process. As joint architects of the change strategy these stakeholders have a strong sense of ownership and are therefore heavily committed to achieving the mutually-agreed results.

+5 Awareness of current reality is comprehensive.

All stakeholders contribute to the creation of a comprehensive database of strategic information, which is kept up to date and made available to all concerned. This database includes information about matters previously considered undiscussable. By having a clear and complete picture of current reality, wise strategic and operational decisions can be made. And with information widely available, power games are minimised.

+6 The focus is on seeing and realising future possibilities.

Behavioural scientist Ron Lippitt discovered that when groups focus on solving problems they become depressed, but when they formulate plans by working backwards from what they really want to create, they develop energy, enthusiasm, optimism and high commitment. Strategic change is not about fixing things that have gone wrong – it’s about identifying bold new possibilities and implementing plans to make them real.

+7 The entire organisation is involved in shaping the vision.

All members of the organisation are involved in shaping a vision of the future. Many management thinkers including Peter Senge (author of *The Fifth Discipline*) have written about the powerfully motivating effect of a compelling vision of the future that is shared by all members of the organisation.

+8 Systems thinking is employed.

Seductively simple models of cause and effect no longer form the basis of strategic decisions. Instead, organisational issues are viewed in all their messy complexity. There is an awareness of multiple causes and effects (including those that are greatly separated in time), mutual causation and repeating patterns of behaviour. When linear thinking is replaced by systems thinking, people stop blaming each other and take personal responsibility for what happens. They realise that control is an illusion, reframe failure as feedback and are better able to adapt quickly to rapidly changing circumstances. For more information on systems thinking, see Appendix II.

+9 Change is guided by and emerges from strategic conversations.

The “transmission of messages” approach to communication is abandoned in favour of an interactive one based on strategic conversations involving members of many different stakeholder groups. By bringing new voices together, new conversations can happen, new perspectives can emerge, new passions can be aroused and new possibilities for the future can emerge. (Acknowledgements: Gary Hamel.)

+10 Planning and implementation are simultaneous.

There is a plan-implement-plan-implement (ad infinitum) sequence so seamless that planning and implementation are no longer viewed as separate activities.

TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF SLOW CHANGE AND FAST CHANGE

SLOW change		FAST change	
-1	Old model of leadership	+1	New model of leadership
-2	Imposed change	+2	Co-created change
-3	Change requires control and domination	+3	Change requires trust and co-operation
-4	Narrow stakeholder involvement	+4	Broad stakeholder involvement
-5	Incomplete map of current reality	+5	Complete map of current reality
-6	Focus on problems	+6	Focus on possibilities
-7	Vision shaped by elite group	+7	Vision shaped by everyone
-8	Linear thinking	+8	Systems thinking
-9	Transmission of messages	+9	Strategic conversations
-10	Plan then implement	+10	Plan & implement simultaneously

41 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR CREATING EFFECTIVE PLANNING MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

Meetings are an essential part of organisational life, particularly those convened to plan the organisation's future. Yet the majority of business meetings – perhaps as many as 70% – are considered by participants to be unproductive.

The same goes for the really big meetings we call corporate conferences. Often these events are nothing more than a ritual gathering of the clans, and achieve little beyond a short term lift in morale.

The time has come for some new thinking. Organisations need planning meetings and conferences that will produce outstanding results consistently. Results such as a compelling vision of the future that everyone owns, action plans that people are wholeheartedly committed to implementing, decisions that have widespread acceptance, and learnings that will enable the organisation to survive and prosper in this time of relentless and ever-accelerating change. How might such meetings and conferences be created?

Martin Leith has identified a set of guiding principles for creating effective meetings and conferences such as:

- ▷ *strategic planning meetings*
- ▷ *problem solving workshops*
- ▷ *think tank sessions*
- ▷ *vision and strategy retreats (“awaydays”)*
- ▷ *change implementation meetings*
- ▷ *corporate conferences*

These principles have been grouped under six main headings: Planning the meeting/conference; Attendance of the meeting/conference; Managing the meeting/conference; Meeting/conference activities; Interaction between participants; Venue, staging and logistics. In each case the traditional thinking is shown first, followed by the new thinking.

Sponsors and designers of planning meetings and conferences will require much commitment and trust when they decide to follow the principles. However, this will eventually lead to high levels of commitment and trust in members of the entire organisation, which will in turn lead to FAST change.

Planning the meeting/conference

- 1 *Conventional thinking: The meeting should be planned and designed by a small group of senior people.*

New thinking: The meeting should be planned and designed by a team that includes a cross section of people (diverse functions, different status levels) who are actually going to take part in it. The new ways of thinking, communicating and working that are required in the meeting under consideration should be modelled in the design team meetings: ‘The change starts here.’

- 2 *Conventional thinking: Plan everything in advance, in great detail. Have scripts and a strict timetable from which nobody will deviate. This creates a quality product, shows professionalism and prevents chaos.*

New thinking: Plan the structure and processes, and let the content take care of itself. The overall focus should be on responding to the needs of the group. To do this, have a flexible programme and, if necessary, be prepared to redesign the event as it happens.

Attendance of the meeting/conference

- 3 *Conventional thinking: People who attend the meeting are to be regarded as the “audience”.*

New thinking: People who attend the meeting are to be

regarded as active participants.

- 4 *Conventional thinking: If necessary, ensure people's attendance by using manipulation, bullying, etc.*

New thinking: As a general rule, people's attendance should be voluntary.

- 5 *Conventional thinking: Don't involve too many people (functions, levels, interest groups) or you won't be able to control the process.*

New thinking: Involve as many people as are needed to get the required levels of information and commitment. The key questions here are: Who knows? Who cares? Who can? There are many effective methods available for managing large diverse groups – see page 7.

- 6 *Conventional thinking: Don't involve junior people (or customers, or suppliers, or members of the local community).*

New thinking: Involve everyone who has a stake in the ongoing viability and success of the organisation. Ask: “If this organisation were to cease to exist, who would be adversely affected?”

Managing the meeting/conference

- 7 *Conventional thinking: The sponsors, chairman and speakers are responsible for what is achieved in the meeting.*

New thinking: The group is responsible for what is achieved in the meeting. (See also #14.)

- 8 *Conventional thinking: People are irresponsible and cannot be trusted to make wise decisions. They therefore need to be kept on a tight rein.*

New thinking: People want to take responsibility for their lives, and can be trusted to make wise decisions as long as they are given all available information and provided with clear boundaries.

- 9 *Conventional thinking: Meetings should be controlled by a chairman or other authority figure who imposes law and order and ensures that everyone keeps to the timetable.*

New thinking: The most successful meetings employ a high degree of self-management. Focus on providing the best environment, structure, processes and facilitation for people to do good work.

- 10 *Conventional thinking: Keep everything under control, minimise risks and avoid chaos at all costs.*

New thinking: Be fluid and go with the flow. Risk taking is essential for growth – create a climate where people feel it is safe to take risks. Help people move through the chaos and discover the creativity and learning that lie beyond.

Meeting/conference activities

General

- 11 *Conventional thinking: Communication should be one way, from the platform to the auditorium. Question and answer sessions should be tightly controlled so that they do not disintegrate into anarchy.*

New thinking: Two way communication between participants, and between participants and facilitator(s), is essential. The facilitator's group process skills will stop anarchy taking over.

- 12 *Conventional thinking: The audience has come to get answers which we – the experts – will provide through a series of presentations. We must never admit that we don't*

have all the answers.

New thinking: Participants have come to pool their knowledge. Experts are largely redundant. It's OK for the leaders to show their ignorance.

- 13** *Conventional thinking: Deliver maximum value by getting straight down to business and filling every minute of the day right through to departure time.*

New thinking: Allow enough time at the beginning for people to fully arrive and connect with the other participants so that a sense of community is created. Punctuate the meeting with lots of breaks. Make sure that time is allowed for a period of completion before people depart.

- 14** *Conventional thinking: Be prescriptive – tell people what to do. Give audience members little or no say in what happens during the meeting.*

New thinking: Ask participants what they want. Encourage them to take individual and collective responsibility for what happens in the meeting.

- 15** *Conventional thinking: To create a businesslike atmosphere, the chairman and presenters should avoid humour, be cool, keep their distance and avoid familiarity.*

New thinking: To create a productive working environment, everyone should strive to keep things as human as possible. People should convey warmth and passion, be authentic and create intimacy.

- 16** *Conventional thinking: Never stray from left-brained activities – i.e. rational, analytical thinking.*

New thinking: Engage the whole person – mind (left and right brain), body, emotions and spirit. Use drawing, music, movement, visualisation – whatever is required to create a meaningful experience.

- 17** *Conventional thinking: People must feel comfortable at all times.*

New thinking: Learning and change can be uncomfortable, so create a suitable container for this discomfort – establish a “safe space” and provide supportive conditions.

- 18** *Conventional thinking: Stick to hard-nosed business issues and avoid anything personal.*

New thinking: Come to terms with the fact that learning and change are very personal matters.

- 19** *Conventional thinking: People will resist anything touchy-feely, arty-farty or otherwise “unconventional”, so there’s no point in considering such activities.*

New thinking: People are capable of enjoying and benefiting from a wide range of experiences. A talented facilitator can inspire a group to engage in all sorts of “unconventional” activities.

- 20** *Conventional thinking: Get people to buy into your ideas by selling them on the benefits.*

New thinking: It's not enough to get people to buy in – they may later experience buyer's remorse. What's needed is ownership. People usually take ownership and give their full commitment when they have had a hand in developing the plan.

- 21** *Conventional thinking: Information is power, so limit its distribution.*

New thinking: During the meeting, ensure that strategic information is surfaced, shared and put on display where everyone can see it.

Learning

- 22** *Conventional thinking: Focus on individual learning.*

New thinking: Focus on learning at the individual and collective levels.

- 23** *Conventional thinking: People learn best by being fed information.*

New thinking: Different people have different learning styles, so build in periods of information giving, thinking, discussion, theorizing, experimentation, discovery, reflection and integration.

Getting started

- 24** *Conventional thinking: At company conferences and strategic awaydays, get the managing director to give an opening address to set the tone, show his commitment, add weight, etc.*

New thinking: There are times when it is appropriate for the managing director to kick things off. However, a rabble-rousing speech can easily lead to cynicism, demotivation, dependency, passivity, rebelliousness and so on.

Problem solving and change

- 25** *Conventional thinking: Focus on solving problems. If you can identify the root causes and eliminate them, success will follow.*

New thinking: Focus on creating a vision of the future that is shared by all key stakeholders, then develop strategies for making the vision real. Problems will dissolve as a by-product of this process.

- 26** *Conventional thinking: Current reality is messy and complex, so simplify it to make things more manageable. You should always be positive and upbeat, so gloss over the painful issues.*

New thinking: Create a map of current reality that is as comprehensive as possible. Include issues that are painful or taboo. Tell the whole truth. Admit that the present state of affairs is messy and complex, and perhaps far removed from what you really want.

- 27** *Conventional thinking: Change is a linear process – a journey from where you are now to where you want to be. The key to effective change management is to invest a lot of time in developing the plan for the overall change programme, then implement it to the letter.*

New thinking: Change is a non-linear process. You rarely reach an end point – it keeps rolling forward. And along the way you are required to adjust your plans many times in order to respond to constantly changing circumstances. This plan-do-review cycle is repeated so frequently that planning and implementation become inseparable.

Workshops, breakout groups and syndicate work

- 28** *Conventional thinking: You can't work interactively with more than 12 to 15 people, so break the large group into syndicate groups.*

New thinking: Although there are times when it's appropriate to create sub-groups, as a rule of thumb it's usually best to keep people together so that (1) they all have access to the same information and (2) they have a shared experience. There are many methods available for working with large groups (20 to 2,000+); some of them are listed on page 7.

- 29** *Conventional thinking: Small groups should be led by a professional facilitator, otherwise they won't complete their tasks effectively.*

New thinking: In most cases it's best for one of the members of the small group to act as facilitator – this eliminates possible dependency. Other members can volunteer for the roles of timekeeper, recorder and spokesperson. These roles can be rotated for different activities.

- 30** *Conventional thinking: When the small group is an intact work team, it should be facilitated by the team's leader.*
 New thinking: Always consider whether it is appropriate for an intact work team to be facilitated by its formal leader. In some cases the result could be dependency, flight, fight or the formation of factions.

Mixing modes (i.e. combining conventional and new approaches)

- 31** *Conventional thinking: "Talking head" conferences are OK as long as you include at least one workshop or syndicate session, which should take the form of a presentation followed by a group discussion.*
 New thinking: It's generally sub-optimal to mix modes, which means combining a participative approach with things like speeches, training input and team building games. As far as possible, eliminate anything that is likely to foster a climate of dependence.

Interaction between participants

- 32** *Conventional thinking: If individuals are to be encouraged to develop a relationship with anyone, then it will be with the chairman or similar authority figure.*
 New thinking: Individuals are to be encouraged to develop relationships with members of the group.
- 33** *Conventional thinking: Providing a list of participants is usually unnecessary – everyone is from the same company and they can consult the internal telephone directory. In exceptional circumstances they may be given a list of names and job titles.*
 New thinking: Encourage post-meeting networking by providing a list of participants with addresses, telephone numbers, fax numbers and e-mail addresses.
- 34** *Conventional thinking: Create a competitive atmosphere.*
 New thinking: Minimise competitiveness; maximise co-operation, collaboration and support.
- 35** *Conventional thinking: Encourage debate.*
 New thinking: Debate creates winners and losers, and is best left to a debating society. Instead, encourage non-judgemental listening, skilful discussion and dialogue. (Details: Fifth Discipline Fieldbook – see page 15 of Guide.)

Venue, staging and logistics

- 36** *Conventional thinking: People won't come to the meeting, or will get rebellious during it, unless it starts late and finishes early. 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. is about right.*
 New thinking: As long as (1) people are clear about what they are committing themselves to, and (2) they consider there's a strong likelihood of the meeting being productive, they will be willing to devote large amounts of their time and energy to it.
- 37** *Conventional thinking: When choosing a venue, the main considerations are access to motorways, the number of AA / RAC / Michelin stars, the leisure facilities (pool, gym, golf, etc.), and price per head.*
 New thinking: When choosing a venue, the main considerations are the suitability of the meeting rooms, the comfort of the chairs, the quality and ambience of the environment, the attitude of the venue's staff, the availability of vast amounts of blank wallspace and the venue's permission to tape large sheets of paper to it.
- 38** *Conventional thinking: Meetings work best in an auditorium modelled on the university lecture theatre: stage, lectern, rows of fixed tiered seating, and so on.*

New thinking: Meetings work best with participants seated in a circle, in concentric circles, in a horseshoe or at round tables. Avoid anything that reminds people of school or that establishes and reinforces a presenter-audience separation.

- 39** *Conventional thinking: Create razzle-dazzle by employing lush backdrops, flashy graphics, smoke machines, lots of audio-visual equipment, and so on.*
 New thinking: Keep technology discreet – it can easily dominate things. And keep surface gloss to a minimum. What people will remember is the quality of the work they did and the relationships that were formed or deepened, not the number of slide projectors.
- 40** *Conventional thinking: Meals and refreshment breaks aren't particularly important.*
 New thinking: Food is more than physical sustenance – it provides emotional nourishment. If people have travelled to the meeting they will be tired and hungry, so feed them immediately on arrival. A meal is a ritual that brings people closer together. Meals and refreshment breaks provide an opportunity to demonstrate how much you care about people's wellbeing. Have self-service tea, coffee and hot and cold water available throughout the day.
- 41** *Conventional thinking: As a mark of professionalism it's a good idea to give people expensive, beautifully-produced name badges.*
 New thinking: Sometimes its useful to have participants make their own name badges. This sets the "we're not going to spoon-feed you" style from the outset, fosters creativity, allows people to express their individuality, encourages self disclosure and gets people talking to each other: "Would you pass the scissors please?"

Remaining faithful the 41 guiding principles is more likely to produce the required results

When conventional thinking is used to create planning meetings and conferences, the consequences listed in the left hand column of Table 2 can be expected (see below). The right hand column shows the results that are generally achieved when the new thinking is employed.

Table 2

RESULTS OF CONVENTIONAL THINKING	RESULTS OF NEW THINKING
Dependence on authority figures for setting and realising outcomes; much blaming	Individual and collective responsibility taken for setting and realising outcomes
Criticism of "their" plans	Ownership of "our" plans
Low level of co-operation	High level of co-operation
<i>Response to change:</i> Half-hearted agreement; resigned acceptance; ambivalence; work-arounds; resistance; sabotage	<i>Response to change:</i> Wholehearted commitment
Slow results or no results	Fast results
Small pockets of improvement	Across-the-board improvements
Little or no increase in organisation's capacity to initiate/respond to change	Big increase in organisation's capacity to initiate/respond to change

LARGE GROUP INTERVENTIONS: NEW-STYLE PLANNING MEETINGS THAT LEAD TO FAST CHANGE

Organisations such as Boeing, PricewaterhouseCoopers, the Engineering Council, Ford Motor Company, Marriott Hotels, Prudential and Shell are using large group intervention methods to create planning meetings and conferences that produce the results listed in Table 2. These methods satisfy most or all of the ten conditions for successful change and are therefore powerful tools for creating FAST change. The 41 guiding principles are a distillation of the beliefs and assumptions that stand behind the large group intervention methods listed below.

A large group intervention is a participative meeting, conference or event where a large number of participants (10 to 2000) comprising a diverse cross-section of an organisation's stakeholders, come together to work on real organisational issues of strategic importance to help bring about FAST change. There are at least 20 large group intervention different methods, of which the best known are currently:

- ▷ **The Conference Model®**
- ▷ **Future Search**
- ▷ **Open Space Technology**
- ▷ **Real Time Strategic Change**
- ▷ **Search Conferences**

A summary of each of these methods appears on pages 10 to 13. Other LGI methods are listed on page 14.

Large group interventions enable hundreds, even thousands, of people to gather together for the purpose of planning strategic change and exploring its implications. Having all stakeholders together in the same room creates a broader information base, improves cross-functional working, facilitates simultaneous planning and implementation, and maximises "whole system" (or organisational) learning.

With large group interventions the message cannot get diluted or distorted, because there are no messages, management directives or motivational speeches. In their place are open conversations and collaborative working. As a result, people don't just buy in to the implementation plan. They helped create the plan, so they readily commit to implementing it.

A large group intervention is more than a mass attendance meeting or conference. It is part of a wider strategic process that includes pre-event work (designing the intervention, often by a design team that is a microcosm of the large group), and post-event activities such as implementing the plans, monitoring progress and modifying the plans if necessary. In some cases a series of events may be called for. Regardless of the method employed, interventions are always customised to meet the particular circumstances.

SOME OTHER APPLICATIONS OF LARGE GROUP INTERVENTIONS

Generating ideas for new products and bringing them to market – quickly

The business environment of the 90s is putting pressure on marketing people to reduce substantially the time it takes to bring new products to market. The old ways of doing innovation are too slow, too cumbersome and too costly. What's needed is an innovative way to do innovation. Open Space Technology and Real Time Strategic Change, two of the large group intervention methods described in this guide, can be used to meet this need. The methods enable organisations to bring

together under one roof a diverse stakeholder group – not just marketing specialists, but people from other functions, suppliers, customers, and representatives from the advertising and PR agencies – so that they can pool their ideas. When the right people are present in the room, the ideas can be checked for feasibility there and then, and plans for turning the ideas into reality can be developed instantly, thus eliminating the time-consuming meetings that would otherwise be needed.

Learning about consumer perceptions

Some far-sighted organisations in the world of advertising and marketing are experimenting with large group intervention methods such as Open Space Technology, and discovering new, highly creative ways to do market research.

Changing the way people work

Organisations will need to adopt new ways of working and new ways of doing business if they are to survive and prosper. Participants in large group interventions experience new ways of working, communicating and relating that are enjoyable, and that produce breakthrough results. These new ways are taken back to the workplace and become institutionalised as normal work practices. Training and development programmes now acquire a strategic focus, driven by immediate business needs identified by the event participants themselves. Large group intervention methods are therefore far more than useful formats for meetings and conferences. They have the potential to set in motion a completely new way of working and doing business.

Enabling community participation

Applications of large group intervention methods are not limited to the world of business, nor is their use restricted to organisations. Throughout the world, communities are using Open Space Technology, Future Search, Search Conferences and other methods to involve residents in shaping the future of their communities. For example, the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham held a one day Open Space meeting on the implementation of Local Agenda 21, a global programme which is aimed at creating environmentally-orientated initiatives within local communities.

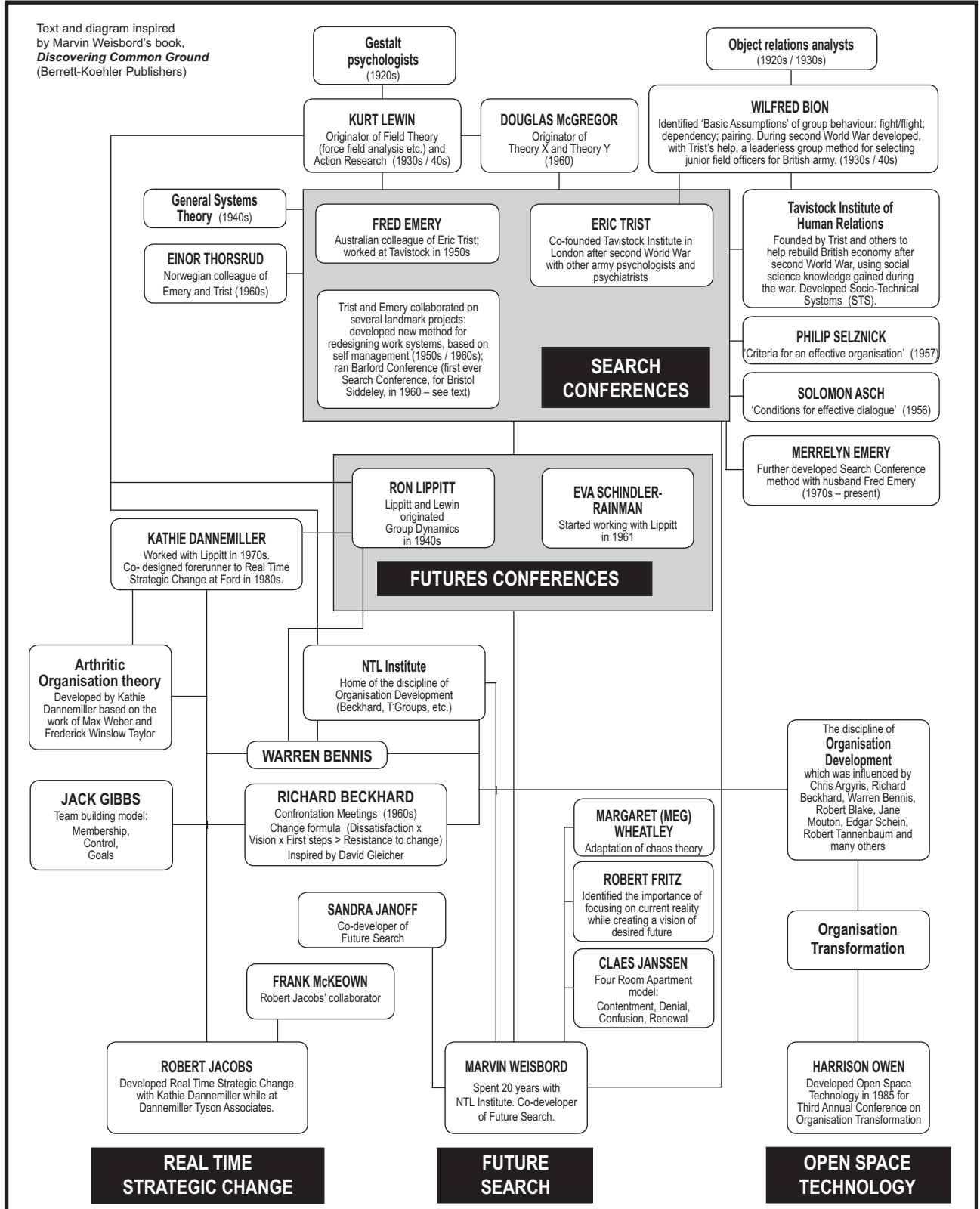
Are you planning a large group intervention? Are you sure that you are ready to fly solo?

A large amount of information has been compressed into this short guide. Virtually all of the subtlety has been omitted.

Creating FAST change requires detailed knowledge of the method you are using, and highly developed skills in such areas as group dynamics, minimalist facilitation and conference logistics. So always be guided by an experienced practitioner when using any of the methods for the first time.

LARGE GROUP INTERVENTION METHODS - A BRIEF HISTORY

The year: 1960. **The place:** Bristol, United Kingdom. **The scenario:** The British government had recently merged Armstrong-Siddeley, a piston engine company, with Bristol Aero Engines, a pioneer of jet engines, to create Bristol Siddeley. The new company was competing with Rolls-Royce to be market leader in jets. Bristol Siddeley's problem: a lack of common plans and strategies. **The task:** to create unified strategy, mission, leadership and values. **The solution:** Eric Trist and Fred Emery were brought in as consultants. Based on their work with Wilfred Bion, they developed the first Search Conference as a way of "unlocking the internal forces of the group". **Conference details:** 5 1/2 days duration; 11 stakeholders; held at Barford House, Warwick, UK. **Postscript:** the event became known as the Barford Conference, and inspired the development of Future Search. Links to Real Time Strategic Change and Open Space Technology can be traced in the diagram below.



AN OVERVIEW OF THREE LARGE GROUP INTERVENTION METHODS

NAME OF METHOD	FUTURE SEARCH	REAL TIME STRATEGIC CHANGE	OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY
PRIMARY PURPOSE	System-wide strategic planning	The design and implementation of whole system change	The creation of self-managed collaborative meetings that generate high levels of ownership
KEY APPLICATIONS	Enabling diverse and potentially conflicting groups to find common ground for constructive action Finding new approaches to tough issues	Creating organisation-wide alignment with mission, vision and strategy Changing the way that organisations change	Resolving complex or conflict-ridden issues in a short period of time Team development and beyond: creating strong community spirit
GROUP SIZE	Ideally 64 (8 tables of 8 people)	Limited only by size of venue	Limited only by size of venue
LENGTH OF EVENT	Two to three days	Two to three days	One, two or three days
DEVELOPERS	Marvin Weisbord Sandra Janoff	Kathie Dannemiller Robert Jacobs	Harrison Owen
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	USA	USA	USA
WHEN DEVELOPED	1980s	1980s	1985
MAIN INFLUENCES	Group dynamics Organisation development Participative communities Search Conferences	Group dynamics Organisation development Participative communities	Annual international conferences on Organisation Transformation
MINIMUM LEAD TIME	Two months	Two months	Two weeks
EVENT DESIGNED BY	Steering committee (mixed stakeholder group)	Design team (mixed stakeholder group which is a microcosm of event participant group)	Sponsor and consultant/facilitator (although some practitioners work with an RTSC-style design team)
VENUE REQUIREMENTS <i>The large room required by all methods must have a flat floor (not a lecture theatre) and plenty of blank wall space</i>	Large room that will accommodate 4 - 8 round tables, each seating 8 people	Large room that will accommodate {number of participants divided by 8} round tables	Large room that will accommodate the whole group seated in a circle or several concentric circles; ten breakout rooms or spaces per 200 participants
MINIMUM STAFFING REQUIREMENTS	Facilitator Co-facilitator/logistics manager	Facilitator Co-facilitator Logistics manager	Facilitator
PREDOMINANT "SMITH" MODE <small>(See p.15: Tell - Sell - Test - Consult - Co-create)</small>	Co-create	Test, Consult, Co-create	Consult, Co-create
CONTRAINDICATIONS	Sponsor wants to tell/sell; sponsor has no intention of implementing action plans; minimum critical specifications cannot be met; sponsor is unwilling to "ride the roller coaster"	Sponsor wants to tell/sell; sponsor is unwilling or unable to meet design principles; sponsor has no intention of implementing action plans	Sponsor wants to tell/sell or control the process; predetermined outcome is required; answer is already known; there is hidden agenda
USERS INCLUDE <i>A range of organisations has been chosen to illustrate diversity</i>	3M Company Local Agenda 21 Programme Shell	Boeing (777 Development) Ford Motor Company Marriott Hotels Mobil	The Engineering Council Diageo Petroleum Development Oman Prudential

THE MAIN LARGE GROUP INTERVENTION METHODS

Future Search

Primary purpose: System-wide strategic planning
Developers: Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff
Length: 2 to 3 days (including 2 nights)
Group size: 64 people

A Future Search conference is a large group planning meeting that brings a “whole system” into the room to work on a task-focused agenda. Members of all significant stakeholder groups (generally a maximum of 64 people) get together for two to three consecutive days to work their way through the five stages of the Future Search process:

- ▷ *Review the past* from perspectives of self, organisation/ community and society; identify the events, trends and developments shaping the future.
- ▷ *Map the present* in all its messy complexity; identify the prouds and sorries resulting from relations with the institution or issue at hand.
- ▷ *Create ideal future scenarios* of the most desirable, attainable future, 5 - 20 years ahead.
- ▷ *Find common ground* and develop a shared vision.
- ▷ *Develop action plans.*

A Future Search conference is planned by a steering committee normally consisting of eight to ten key stakeholders. Participants sit at round tables in mixed stakeholder groups, with about eight people to a table. Much of the work is done at the wall on very large sheets of paper (details of a paper supplier are given on page 19). The review of the past uses three “timeline” charts – one for personal milestones, another for important organisational or community developments, and a third for global events – divided horizontally into decades, typically the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s. Participants then create a single giant mind map to show current reality in all its messy complexity, and this is followed by session where people say what they are proud and sorry about regarding the current situation. Then comes the generation of ideal future scenarios: mixed groups make creative presentations that convey their vision of the future, usually five, ten or twenty years ahead. Common ground is then identified, with unresolved differences not worked but acknowledged and listed. The action planning that completes the Future Search is normally done in functional or self-selecting groups.

The main conditions for a successful Future Search conference are:

1. The *whole system* participates – a cross-section of as many interested parties as is practical.
2. Future scenarios – for an organisation, community or issue – are put into a *historical and global perspective*.
3. People *self-manage* their work, and use dialogue (not problem solving) as the main tool.
4. *Common ground* rather than conflict management is the frame of reference.

A detailed account of how to create a Future Search conference is given in Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff's book *Future Search* (see page 19 of this guide).

The Conference Model®

Primary purpose: Accelerated redesign of an organisation into self-managed high performance workteams
Developers: Dick and Emily Axelrod
Length: Each of the four conferences (see below) takes two days
Group size: Typically around 60 people per conference

The Conference Model® was pioneered in 1992 by Dick and Emily Axelrod (The Axelrod Group, USA) with their client R R Donnelley. They developed the model as a faster and more acceptable alternative to the Socio-Technical Systems approach, where a multi-functional task force redesigns the organisation, usually taking a whole year to do so. The model is based on principles drawn primarily from Socio-Technical Systems and Future Search. The Axelrods were also influenced by Robert Fritz, who discovered that when an organisation forms a compelling vision of the future followed by a thorough assessment of current reality, a phenomenon called “structural tension” comes into play which seeks to close the gap between vision and reality.

The Axelrods' model consists of a series of four conferences:

1. Visioning Conference

Participants develop an understanding of the organisation's history and current situation and form a vision of how they would like the organisation to be in the future. This conference is very similar to a Future Search event (see left hand column on this page).

2. Customer/Supplier conference

Participants develop an understanding of external and internal customer/supplier relationships, how they work and what's required and desired for the future.

3. Technical Conference

Participants develop an understanding of the flow or process of doing business, determine variances (deviations from required standards) that occur and become aware of how these are currently handled by the organisation.

4. Organisational Design Conference

Based on learnings from the other three conferences (and the “walkthrus” – see below), participants design an organisation that will enable it to realise its vision, meet the needs of its most important customers/suppliers, and get variances as close to zero as possible.

The Organisational Design conference is sometimes followed by one or more Co-Creation Conferences where participants refine specific parts of the organisational design and create detailed implementation plans.

The series of conferences is designed by a steering committee of around 20 people drawn from all parts of the organisation, supported by one or two consultants experienced in the method. Four to six of these people become full-time members of the data assist team, whose job it is to synthesise information emerging from each of the four conferences and present it to those who did not participate in the conference at “action replay” sessions called walkthrus.

In essence The Conference Model® consists of four elements: [1] the *enabling function* (steering committee plus data assist team), [2] the *four conferences*, [3] the *walkthrus*, and [4] *implementation*.

Search Conferences

Primary purpose: System-wide strategic planning
Developers: Eric Trist and Fred Emery. Further developed by Fred and Merrelyn Emery
Length: Two days (including two nights)
Group size: 32 people

Search Conferences were developed in the 1960s by Eric Trist and Fred Emery, based on open systems principles. The story of the first Search Conference appears on page 9. Search Conferences pre-date Future Search by more than 20 years, although Future Search appears first in this guide because, in Europe at least, it tends to be better known. Although the two methods share certain key features, there are a number of significant differences:

- ▷ Future Search looks at a progression of events from the past to the present and into the future, whereas Search Conferences are concerned with finding the best fit between the system and its environment.
- ▷ In a Search Conference more of the work is done in the large group.
- ▷ Future Search has members of the wider system (external stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, parent company) take part in the entire event. Full participation in a Search Conference is restricted to members of the system in focus. Although stakeholders from outside the system may be invited to participate in the first part of the conference, it is more usual for information from these people to be obtained through a pre-conference environmental scan.
- ▷ Although both methods make extensive use of large sheets of paper taped to the wall so that information is available for all to see, in a Future Search event participants also complete personal worksheets. The Search Conference method places more emphasis on the rationalisation of conflict than Future Search, and does not include certain Future Search activities such as skits.

A Search Conference consists of three parts:

1. **Learning about the environment**

- Identifying the social changes affecting the future of the system (business, institution, community, etc.).
- Imagining the *probable* future of the world, and articulating a *desirable* (i.e. preferable) global future.

2. **Learning about the system**

- Tracking the system's history and examining its current functioning. Agreeing what elements to keep, what to drop and what to create.
- Determining the most desirable future of the system.
- Creating a prioritised list of key strategic objectives to be achieved within a given timeframe (typically five to ten years into the future).

3. **Action planning** (*integrating the system with the environment*)

- Identifying constraints and finding ways to eliminate them.
- Developing implementation plans and agreeing next steps.

A Search Conference is frequently used as a front-end planning process, prior to a complete redesign of the system aimed at making it democratic and participative. The Participative Design Workshop process, which is closely related to the Search Conferences method, may directly follow the conference or be an integral part of it.

Water Quality in the Upper Colorado River Basin

This is a story about how three consultants – Bob Rehm, Rita Schweitz and Elaine Granata – used Search Conferences to address one of the most intractable social and environmental problems in our society: water quality. The setting was Colorado, USA, but it could just as easily have been the Pennines in the UK.

Although the consulting team was initially brought in by a regional planning agency responsible for the state Water Quality Plan, none of the stakeholder groups was willing to be seen as the overall sponsor in case the others were discouraged from participating. The consultants therefore chose to consider the whole system as its client and contracted with various parts for various purposes.

The principal goal of the project was to create a paradigm shift – a new co-operative dialogue among diverse water stakeholders. The consultants believed that Search Conferences were the best way to achieve this for three main reasons:

1. *The problem was complex – with such a tangled web of contributing factors it was not possible to address it using linear problem solving methods.*
2. *It was necessary to bring together many stakeholders with diverse and sometimes conflicting views: agricultural, industrial and recreational water users; local and municipal governments; federal and state agencies; water providers; water and sanitation districts.*
3. *The diverse interest groups would need to set aside their differences and find common ground for collaborative action.*

A planning group which was a microcosm of the whole was formed, and it met three times to set objectives, handle invitations and plan conference logistics. Their communications emphasised an open-ended process rather than the need for a specific agenda or action plans to emerge. Much time was spent perfecting the invitation, as there had been a history of contention and litigation. Personal telephone calls were made to certain key stakeholders whose presence was important.

48 stakeholders took part in the conference, which was held over two nights and two full days in November 1991, six months after the first meeting with the consultants. The results exceeded many people's expectations. A shared vision was created and action plans agreed. People felt positive about the future.

The desired paradigm shift happened: the whole conference agreed to reconvene in March 1992, and by June 1992 the stakeholders were calling themselves the Colorado Rivers Headwaters Forum, and meeting regularly.

Real Time Strategic Change

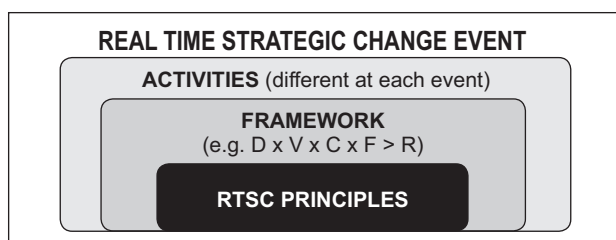
Primary purpose: The design and implementation of “whole system” change
Developers: Kathie Dannemiller and Robert Jacobs
Length: 2 to 3 days
Group size: Limited only by size of venue

The lineage of Real Time Strategic Change (RTSC) connects with that of Future Search, and the two methods are similar in several ways. For example, participants sit eight to a table in mixed stakeholder groups, and the two or three day event consists of a sequence of small and large group activities determined by a design team. In fact, using the principles of Real Time Strategic Change listed below, it would be possible to create an event that looks very much like a Future Search conference. However, there are some important differences.

- ▷ The group size can be considerably larger than the 64 maximum of Future Search. For example, 2,200 people took part in an event held at the Ford Motor Company (see panel opposite).
- ▷ An RTSC event is designed by a design team. (See below.)
- ▷ There is no fixed framework on which the individual, small and large group activities hang. However, Beckhard’s change formula $D \times V \times F > R$ is often used: the product of D (dissatisfaction with current state of affairs), V (a vision of how things could be) and F (first steps towards realising that vision) must be greater than R (resistance to change).
- ▷ RTSC is not just an event, but the beginning of a process that leads to a fundamental system-wide change in the way the organisation works.

At the core of RTSC, deep beneath the sequenced activities and the underlying framework (Beckhard’s change formula or whatever), are seven immutable design principles:

1. Get the *whole system* (or a large representative sample of it) in the room. Have a microcosm of this system design the event. Include a few sceptics. Do not blindly follow the agenda shown on page 58 of Jacobs’ RTSC handbook.
2. Foster maximum *ownership* of process, content and outcomes.
3. Work in *real time* (simultaneous planning and implementation).
4. Treat *current reality* as a key driver. Work with the group where it is, rather than where you think it ought to be.
5. Include *preferred futuring*, where participants create a compelling representation of what “better” will look, sound and feel like.
6. Build and maintain a *common database* of strategic information that is available to all.
7. Create *community* – foster an environment where individuals come together as part of something larger than themselves that they created and believe in.



Boeing Commercial Triple-7 Project

Designing and building a new airliner is a large, lengthy, complex project. Phil Condit was the executive in charge of the Triple-7 project and he used the principles of Real Time Strategic Change not just to run large scale meetings, but to create a whole new way of working. Condit’s intention was: “to get everyone on board, get them involved in the process throughout the design and build cycle, get feedback on how we were doing, and build a different kind of community.”

The project had a five year deadline, took four years to complete and was the single largest product development project in the United States during the 1990s. Large group meetings became the norm, and some of them involved 500 to 5,000 participants. Every group joining the project attended a large-scale orientation meeting led by a vice president of the company.

As an indication of how large group meetings speeded up the development process, when the whole Boeing organisation went through a quality improvement programme, Triple-7 employees completed it in two days, whereas every other group needed four days.

Ford Motor Company

Real Time Strategic Change was pioneered during the mid-1980s at Ford Motor Company in the United States by a team of internal and external consultants that included the late Kathie Dannemiller, former president emeritus of the consulting firm Dannemiller Tyson Associates. Ford has continued to push the boundaries of this large group method. In 1994 a bargaining committeeman by the name of Gil Rodriguez was trying to figure out how to involve all 2,200 employees at Ford’s Dearborn, Michigan Assembly Plant in a series of RTSC events. The initial idea was to design events for 500 people at a time, with each session being held on three consecutive Sundays. But this would have taken four and a half months to complete.

Instead, Rodriguez and his colleagues brought all 2,200 people together for a single three day event. Four rooms were used, each holding 550 people, and all 2,200 participants joined together for certain parts of the process in a large auditorium. The agenda was designed in such a way that presenters making key stakeholder inputs could rotate to ensure that all participants heard the same message. Closed circuit television enabled a number of simultaneous presentations to be made to all 2,200 people.

Despite the logistical complexities, the event was a success and the results were remarkably similar to those that had been achieved with much smaller groups.

Open Space Technology

Primary purpose: The creation of self-managed meetings that generate high levels of ownership

Developer: Harrison Owen

Length: One, two or three days

Group size: Limited only by size of venue

Open Space Technology enables participants in meetings and conferences to create and manage their own programme of parallel sessions around a central theme, such as: *What are the issues and opportunities facing the XYZ Corporation?* People come together, often in large numbers and usually representing enormous diversity, to pool their ideas and develop plans for creative and collaborative action.

The Open Space approach is particularly effective when used to resolve complex or conflict-ridden issues in a short period of time, and when innovation and ownership are the desired outcomes. A prerequisite is that the focal issue or theme must be of genuine concern to all involved. The group can be of any size, from 10 people to 1,000 or more. All stakeholders are invited, but participation is voluntary. The event can be of any length – usually one, two or three days.

Open Space principles:

- ▷ Whoever comes are the right people.
- ▷ Whenever it starts is the right time.
- ▷ Wherever it happens is the right place.
- ▷ Whatever happens is the only thing that could happen.
- ▷ When it's over, it's over.
- ▷ If you find yourself in a situation where you are neither learning nor contributing, it is your responsibility to use The Law of Two Feet to go elsewhere.

This is what happens at an Open Space event:

1. Participants gather for the opening plenary. They sit in a circle, to indicate that everyone is a leader.
2. The facilitator states the theme of the event, describes the principles that underpin Open Space Technology and explains what is going to happen.
3. Anyone who feels so inspired can offer one or more sessions (such as a presentation, workshop, discussion group or task force) by creating a simple poster showing the title of the session and his or her name, choosing a room and timeslot and making a brief announcement to the whole group.
4. The posters are fixed to the wall and participants sign up for the sessions that they wish to attend. Much negotiating usually occurs at this point: convenors offering sessions on similar topics may decide to join forces and people may ask certain convenors to re-time their sessions to make participation possible.
5. Participants then self-organise and pursue what interests them.
6. The large group reconvenes at certain points and at the end of the event to share what has transpired.
7. There is often an additional plenary session for prioritising issues and developing action plans in project teams.
8. At the end of the event everyone receives a set of reports from all the sessions, which usually include action points.

Rockport Company

On the morning of Thursday 21st October 1993, the Rockport Company, a subsidiary of Reebok International, closed for two days. No shoes were shipped. No orders were processed. Scheduled meetings were cancelled. The head office was locked.

Except for a skeleton crew left behind to answer the phones, all 350 members of Rockport's workforce, including John Thorbeck, the company's president, and his senior executives, gathered in a cavernous warehouse for a two day meeting which had no agenda. Harrison Owen stepped into the centre of the loosely-formed circle of intrigued participants to make his opening introduction. Half an hour later his briefing was complete, and it was time for people to make their offerings. It took a little while for things to get moving, but eventually one Rockport employee stepped forward, then another.

Within an hour an energised group had posted dozens of issues on the wall: distribution, on-time delivery, customer service, excess raw materials. Some topics had never before been acknowledged as issues of concern, such as women's perceptions of the Rockport environment, eliminating political games, overcoming "we vs. they" thinking, getting rid of paperwork. By the end of day two, 66 different sessions had taken place, with the number of participants ranging from five to 150 or more on the hot topics.

At one point during the event a security guard (who wasn't even a Rockport employee) happened to mention that he spent a lot of time on his feet and would love to wear the kind of comfortable shoes that Rockport made. But his company would never buy them as they didn't go with the security company's uniform. Why couldn't Rockport redesign the uppers to match the uniform? And so a new product range was born. If it is nothing more than an average performer in the market, sales will be around \$20 million per year.

At the planning stage of the Open Space event Anthony Tiberii, Rockport's senior vice president and chief financial officer, had been one of its most vocal opponents. He felt that the company could not afford to lose two whole shipping days. After the event he changed his mind, and was easily able to justify the investment.

In his book *The Pursuit of Wow!*, management expert Tom Peters tells the story of the Rockport event, which he refers to as an "all-hands strategy retreat". He issues a bold challenge to his readers:

'Got the nerve to try Open Space for your next all-hands strategy session? You do have all-hands strategy sessions, don't you?'

OTHER LARGE GROUP INTERVENTION METHODS

Many more methods exist for working with large groups. Those known to the author are briefly described below. Please inform us if you are aware of any other methods.

Collaborative Design (*Langdon Morris*) Inspired by the work of Stafford Beer (see Team Syntegrity), the method is a fairly structured approach to strategic problem solving, and is described in Morris's book, *Managing the Evolving Organisation*, published by Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, USA.

Fast Cycle Full Participation STS Re-design (*Bill Pasmore, Al Fitz and Gary Frank*) A work design method based on Socio-Technical Systems principles.

Frameworks for Change (*Joy Drake and Kathy Tyler*)

A version of The Transformation Game designed for teams, groups and small organisations. A group of up to 24 people makes a deep exploration of a key organisational issue.

Futures Conferences (*Ron Lippitt and Eva Schindler-Rainman*) A method to help create collaborative communities.

Future Workshops (*Robert Jungk*) Brainstorming-based approach developed in the early 1960s consisting of four phases: (1) Preparatory, (2) Critique, (3) Fantasy and (4) Implementation. Full details: *Future Workshops*, by Robert Jungk and Norbert Müllert (Institute for Social Inventions, London).

Gameplan (*David Sibbet*) A highly visual approach to goal setting and plan formulation. A specially prepared large sheet of white paper is taped to the wall. It shows a target (goals), a large horizontal arrow (stages and tasks), a rectangle surrounded by small circles (the team), wheels (success factors), and hills (challenges). The meeting is spent adding detail to the outline.

Idealized Design Sessions (*Russell Ackoff*) A strategic planning method. More information can be found in Ackoff's books *Creating the Corporate Future* (John Wiley, New York, USA), and *Democratic Corporations* (publisher not known).

Institute for Cultural Affairs Model (*Institute for Cultural Affairs*) A large-scale strategic planning method developed and refined during the past 25 years and consisting of four stages: (1) Shared vision; (2) Underlying contradictions; (3) Strategic directions; and (4) Tactical action plan.

Participative Design Workshops (*Fred and Merrelyn Emery*)

A close relative of Search Conferences, this is a method for involving people in restructuring their own workplace so that it is self managing.

Quetico Centre Workshop Model (*Quetico Centre*) Based on the standard three-stage model of organisation development: (1) Create vision of the future; (2) Identify current state of readiness; and (3) Decide what needs to be done to move from where you are now to where you want to be.

Quick Market Intelligence (*Wal-Mart*) Involves rapid cycles of information gathering, interpretation, decision making and communication.

Real Time Work Design (*Kathie Dannemiller*) Pioneered by one of the originators of Real Time Strategic Change, together with her colleagues at Dannemiller Tyson Associates.

Simu-Real (*Don Klein*) A method that simulates the work environment so that issues can surface and be explored, and behaviours can be examined.

Starting Conferences (*Øyvind Pålshaugen*) A work design method inspired by Search Conferences.

Strategic Visioning (*Michale Doyle, modified into a seven step gameboard by The Bailey Alliance*) Based on change formula $D \times V \times F > R$ (see page 12). The steps are: (1) Stakeholder analysis, (2) Scanning and forecasting, (3) Mission and vision, (4) Guiding values and principles, (5) Current reality, (6) Strategies/change management, and (7) Potential barriers.

Team Syntegrity (*Stafford Beer*) Developed by pioneer of management cybernetics and creator of the Viable Systems Model, TeamSyntegrity enables "Infosets" of 30 people to share

information and explore topics of mutual interest. The method is described in considerable detail in Beer's book, *Beyond Dispute*, published by John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, UK.

Transformation by Design (*Langdon Morris*) The method is described in Morris's book – see COLLABORATIVE DESIGN entry for details.

Whole Scale Change Events (*Kathie Dannemiller*) Dannemiller Tyson's version of Real Time Strategic Change.

Work-out (*General Electric*) A format for meetings designed to help bring about cultural change.

SOME RELATED APPROACHES

There are a number of powerful approaches for working with large and small groups that, strictly speaking, are not large group intervention methods. However, this guide would be incomplete if the following approaches were not included.

Appreciative Inquiry (*David Cooperrider & colleagues*) The traditional problem solving approach is about fixing things that have gone wrong. Appreciative inquiry is concerned with what is going right, and builds on that to realise new possibilities.

Community Building (*M Scott Peck*) Most groups exist in a state of what Peck calls PSEUDO-COMMUNITY. The community building process allows the group to work through the states of CHAOS and EMPTINESS to achieve true COMMUNITY.

Dialogue (*David Bohm*) Through a process of collective inquiry, participants develop a deeper understanding of one another and of differing points of view, and emerge with new approaches to old problems

Skillful Discussion (*Rick Ross*) Participants in a skillful (*sic*) discussion follow a set of protocols that enable them to apply a high degree of mindfulness to reaching their decisions. The protocols cover five areas: (1) Noting intentions, (2) Balancing advocacy with inquiry, (3) Building shared meaning, (4) Using self awareness as a resource, and (5) Exploring impasses.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD FACILITATOR OF LARGE GROUP INTERVENTIONS?

An effective facilitator of large group events requires these attributes:

- ▶ A powerful presence.
- ▶ An agreeable, positive personality.
- ▶ Credibility with the participant group.
- ▶ Impartiality – no interest vested in outcomes. An absence of politics and power games.
- ▶ The ability to use a broad range of facilitation styles (e.g. hands-on as well as hands-off facilitation).
- ▶ The belief in people's ability to self-manage their work.
- ▶ A commitment to democracy in action.
- ▶ The desire to create open systems.
- ▶ A strong process awareness and skills (the *how*), linked to an outcome orientation (the *what*). Midwifery is a useful metaphor here.
- ▶ Trust in "the process" (the flow of life) and a willingness to follow it. See *The Tao of Leadership* by John Heider (Wildwood House).
- ▶ The belief that the needs of the group come first, linked to the ability to work wherever the group is, rather than where it's supposed to be.
- ▶ Congruence and an unshakeable belief in the large group intervention method being used.
- ▶ Wisdom, maturity, integrity, humour and compassion in large measure.
- ▶ The willingness to let people struggle, to let them be in chaos and not rescue them.
- ▶ A high degree of self-awareness and the willingness to work on own "issues" (such as the need for approval).

GAINING WIDESPREAD COMMITMENT TO THE ORGANISATION'S VISION, STRATEGY AND PLANS

In the Fifth Discipline Fieldbook (1994 – Nicholas Brealey, p314) Peter Senge's colleague Bryan Smith describes five modes for creating a shared vision.

- ▶ **Telling** is where the boss has decided what the vision is going to be, and presents it to the organisation as a fait accompli.
- ▶ **Selling** is slightly less prescriptive – here the boss spells out the benefits of the proposed new future in an attempt to get people to buy into it.
- ▶ **Testing** is when the boss presents a draft vision and asks people for their reactions.
- ▶ **Consulting** involves the boss soliciting people's ideas before putting pen to paper.
- ▶ **Co-creating** is a collaborative process where everyone creates the vision together.

Smith's model is very useful when seeking to understand the role of large group interventions in developing a vision for an organisation, and creating a strategy and implementation plans for making the vision real.

BRYAN SMITH'S FIVE MODES FOR CREATING A SHARED VISION <small>(extended to cover the three levels of vision, strategy and implementation plans)</small>	TELL	SELL	TEST	CONSULT	CO-CREATE
	Demand compliance	Seek buy-in	Invite response	Request input	Collaborate
Does vision, strategy or plan already exist?	Yes (final form)	Yes (final form)	Yes (draft form)	No	No
Who decides on the final vision, strategy or plan?	Boss	Boss	Boss	Boss	
Communication method	Top-down transmission of information	Top-down transmission of information	Top-down and bottom-up transmission of information	Top-down and bottom-up transmission of information	Conversation
Level of engagement (and therefore commitment to action)					High
Approximate correlation of LGI methods to the five modes	None	None	Real Time Strategic Change	Real Time Strategic Change	Open Space Future Search Search Conferences

The five modes of *tell*, *sell*, *test*, *consult* and *co-create* can be applied equally to an organisation's *vision*, *strategy* and *implementation plans*. This concept is clarified in the text and diagram below.

AN EXAMPLE SHOWING HOW ALL THREE LEVELS ARE ADDRESSED - VISION, STRATEGY AND PLANS

The XYZ Corporation decides to use large group intervention methods to accelerate the integration of LKJ, a company it has recently acquired. A design team is assembled, its members drawn from different functions and levels within XYZ and LKJ. The team designs a large group event based on the Real Time Strategic Change method. The event commences with the chief executive of XYZ outlining the board's vision for the integrated XYZ/LKJ business, spelling out all of the benefits. Everyone seems to buy into the new vision. The leadership team then presents a draft strategy for translating the vision into reality. Participants work in small mixed groups to identify fatal flaws in the strategy and suggest how it might be improved. While everyone else is having dinner the leadership team modifies the strategy, based on the feedback received earlier. The following morning the revised

strategy is presented to participants, and after some minor modifications it is adopted unanimously. Participants spend the rest of the second day in functional teams developing detailed action plans for implementing the strategy. At the end of the second day everyone is ready to commit to implementing their part of the plan. Six months later the whole group reconvenes to check progress and update plans. A year after the acquisition a strategic review is held and the consensus is that LKJ has been integrated successfully.

Mode Level	TELL	SELL	TEST	CONSULT	CO-CREATE
VISION		✓			
STRATEGY			✓		
IMPLEMENTATION PLANS					✓

Coaching A new paradigm for management based on (1) helping players (i.e. organisation members) get a new view of the game, a new vision of what's possible and access to inner resources; and (2) giving committed support and feedback.

Culture The totality of factors that give an enterprise its distinctive character, that shape the behaviour of its members and give rise to beliefs about how the enterprise should be managed. Such factors include tacit assumptions, beliefs, values, standards, rules, behavioural norms, customs and practices, rituals and ceremonies, myths and legends, symbols, formal and informal networks and communication channels, reporting structures, reward systems, leadership style, decision making processes, artefacts and corporate identity.

Facilitator A person whose role in a meeting is to help the group find an effective process (the "how") for achieving its outcomes (the "what").

Intervention An action or set of actions consciously designed to solve a problem – often a complex or intractable one – or bring about some sort of change for the better.

Large group event A participative meeting or conference where a large number of people (10 to 2000 or more), comprising a diverse cross-section of an organisation's stakeholders, come together to work on real organisational issues of strategic importance to help the organisation become better fit for the future.

Large group intervention The planning and design work preceding a large group event together with the event itself. An LGI is usually part of a bigger change process.

Large group intervention method A framework, technology or set of guiding principles used to create a large group intervention. Among the most widely-used LGI methods are The Conference Model[®], Future Search, Open Space Technology, Real Time Strategic Change and Search Conferences.

Learning organisation An organisation that remains viable and fulfils its purpose by ensuring that the rate of its learning is faster than the rate of change in the external environment.

Metaphysics The philosophical discipline that deals with the ultimate nature of things.

New world organisation An organisation that bases its decisions on a systemic view of the world and whose stakeholders co-create a shared future. The purpose of *new world* organisations is contributing to the economic well-being and quality of life of all stakeholders, and the well-being of the planet. A *new world* organisation is like a diamond. Facets of the diamond include the learning organisation (Senge et al), the revolutionary organisation (Hamel), the participative organisation (McLagan & Nel), the resilient or RapidResponse organisation (Deevy) and the millennium organisation (Owen).

OD Organisation development.

Old world organisation A machine-like organisation that considers its primary purpose to be maximising shareholder value. The predominant management approach in old world organisations is command and control.

Organisation development OD emerged from the behavioural sciences and the human potential movement in the early 1960s as a process for helping organisations solve problems and more fully realise their potential. Some of the pioneers of OD were associated with National Training Laboratories in Bethel, Maine, USA (now NTL Institute).

Organisation transformation The function of organisation transformation is similar to that of organisational development. What makes it different is its foundation on a systemic model of change, and its concern with such matters as the full expression of the spirit, the fulfilment of the organisation's higher purpose, the future well-being of the planet and the evolution of human consciousness.

Organisation transformation conferences International gatherings that have been held every year since 1983 (OT1), and which are attended by managers, consultants, developers and others who are attracted to the field of organisation transformation (see above).

OT Organisation transformation.

Paradigm See *Worldview*.

Purpose Reason for existing.

Socio-Technical Systems A set of principles developed by Eric Trist and Fred Emery for creating a better fit between people (social system) and tools and techniques (technical system). STS has had a major influence on modern work redesign methods.

Spirit An animating life-force; an energy that inspires a person toward certain ends or purposes that go beyond self-interest. Spirit can inspire super-human efforts to accomplish something. We can never observe this force directly; it can only be inferred from behaviour and social practices.

Stakeholder A person, group, organisation or other entity that affects or can be affected by an organisation's actions.

Strategic Consciously orientated towards a chosen future.

Viability Capacity for ongoing independent existence.

Vision "A target that beckons" (Warren Bennis). A clearly-defined picture or representation of an ideal end state: when your organisation is functioning perfectly, with optimal contribution to the well-being of stakeholders, what will it look like, sound like, and feel like?

Worldview The set of fundamental beliefs and organising principles which are unquestioned and unexamined assumptions about the nature of reality. The word *paradigm* has a similar meaning.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR ADOPTING A WHOLE SYSTEM WORLDVIEW

During the past ten years the environment in which managers operate has fundamentally changed. Some of the factors driving this change are:

- ▶ *The pressure on managers to do more with less*
- ▶ *Increasing management sophistication*
- ▶ *Instant global communications*
- ▶ *The impact of IT and other technology*
- ▶ *The relentless explosion of information*
- ▶ *Increased competition*
- ▶ *Consumer power*
- ▶ *The globalisation of markets and economics*
- ▶ *The fragmentation of certain markets*
- ▶ *Retailer dominance*
- ▶ *The westernisation of developing countries*
- ▶ *Shareholder pressure*
- ▶ *Media pressure*
- ▶ *Demographic changes*
- ▶ *Changing values and aspirations*
- ▶ *Environmentalism*
- ▶ *The changing role of women*
- ▶ *New legislation*
- ▶ *The European Union*

An increasing number of managers feel they are losing control. The business climate is becoming more and more turbulent and ever more complex. The pace of change is accelerating so fast that they can't keep up. They make plans for the future, but conventional planning methods cannot cope with so much uncertainty, so many sudden unexpected leaps and unforeseen chains of reaction. They do their best to solve problems, but all too often feel they are just making matters worse.

What managers are doing isn't working because their worldview is out of date. A worldview is an individual's set of fundamental beliefs and organising principles, his or her unexamined and unquestioned assumptions about the nature of reality. It's like the operating system in a computer.

The worldview that underpins most people's thinking – let's call it W1 – is based on the science of Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and Isaac Newton (1642-1727). This means that people try to understand and control the world by breaking it down into its component parts, and attempt to predict the consequences of their actions in the same way that they might predict the destination of a billiard ball – through a mechanical, linear model of cause and effect.

But the world isn't a billiard table – it's a complex web of interconnected causes and effects, some instantaneous and some with a very long time lag. People with the ability to survive and prosper in this baffling new world are the ones who have adopted W2, a new worldview that incorporates modern scientific knowledge, including quantum mechanics, chaos theory and, most importantly, systems thinking.

When managers upgrade to W2 their capabilities increase dramatically:

- ▶ They make more effective decisions.
- ▶ They are able to use leverage to translate minimum effort or resources into maximum results.
- ▶ Their sense of what's possible expands.
- ▶ Their spirit and creative genius is released.
- ▶ Change, growth, development and evolution become natural and desirable states of being.
- ▶ They are able to harness effectively the collective energies

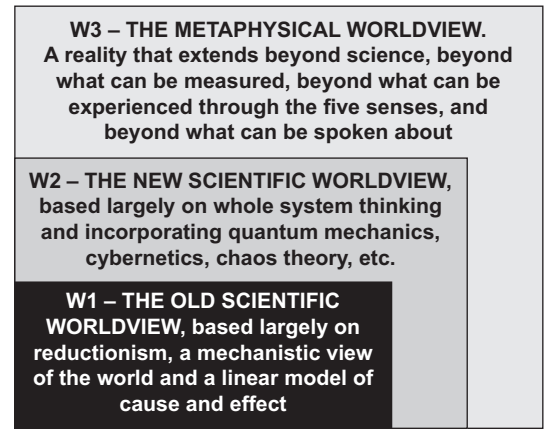
of those they work with.

Although the whole system worldview has been the predominant way of thinking in the East for thousands of years, it is relatively new in the West – neither general systems theory nor cybernetics emerged until the 1940s. But we are beginning to see evidence that the new worldview is gaining ground. For example, an increasing number of people, dissatisfied with the piecemeal approach of conventional medicine, are turning to holistic approaches to health and psychology.

Indications that systems thinking is being taken up by managers are many and growing. For example, many business schools, management colleges and training organisations now offer courses on systemic thinking. And one of the best-selling business books in recent years has been Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation* (1992 – Doubleday/Century Business). The five disciplines described by Senge are: Shared Vision, Mental Models, Team Learning, Personal Mastery, and the fifth discipline of the book's title – Systems Thinking.

WORLDVIEWS OLD AND NEW

A worldview is a set of fundamental beliefs, axioms and assumptions that order, and provide coherence to, our perception of what is and how it works. Generally, new worldviews do not replace old ones, but subsume them, as illustrated below.



Nine key management principles based on systems thinking

Systems thinking expert Tony Hodgson has identified nine management principles that will enable organisations to survive and prosper in these times of relentless and ever-accelerating change.

1. *The rate of learning must be faster than the rate of change.*
2. *Internal flexibility must be greater than external turbulence.*
3. *Internal collaboration must be greater than internal conflict.*
4. *Clarity of vision must rise above information explosion.*
5. *Corporate mission must be stronger than disintegrative forces.*
6. *Innovative proactivity must predominate over conservative tendencies.*
7. *Quality as the basis of achievement must supersede quantity.*

Appendix III

OLD WORLD AND NEW WORLD ORGANISATIONS COMPARED

In the table below, characteristics and management practices of old world organisations (i.e. those based on the mechanistic worldview W1) are shown in the left hand column. Corresponding characteristics and management practices of new world organisations (i.e. those based on a “whole system” worldview, W2) are shown in the column on the right.

OLD WORLD ORGANISATIONS (based on W1)	NEW WORLD ORGANISATIONS (based on W2)
Organisations as machines; emphasis on “hard” dimensions: strategy, structure and systems	Organisations as organisms; emphasis on the “soft” dimensions: style, staff, skills and shared values
Focus on creating shareholder value	Focus on creating stakeholder value
Hierarchical structure; old model of leadership based on command and control	Flexible, network-based structure; new model of leadership based on coaching and facilitation
Leadership’s job is providing solutions	Leadership’s job is increasing capacity to adapt
Managers think; workers do what they’re told	Employees trusted to make wise decisions based on “informed discretion”
Results accomplished through effectiveness of individuals	Results accomplished through effectiveness of teams of mutually-dependent people
Control by rules, punishment and reward	Shared vision and values provide direction and motivation
Focus on competition (win/lose)	Focus on collaboration (<i>win/win – and beyond</i>)
Single-function specialisms	Multi-functional project teams
Inward-looking; focus is on the organisation	Focus is on all stakeholders
Job description setting out tasks and responsibilities	Continuously negotiated and reviewed assignments
Linear thinking	Systems thinking (<i>but see next item</i>)
“Either/or” thinking	“Both/and” thinking
Approach to problem solving is directive, fragmented, mechanistic	Approach to problem solving is participative, holistic, cybernetic (<i>i.e. having feedback loops</i>)
Rewards maintenance of the status quo	Rewards value creation
Defensive routines that maintain the status quo	Double-loop learning (<i>questioning and correcting the assumptions that underpin decisions and actions</i>) that enables organisation to realise new possibilities
Standardisation is valued	Diversity is valued
Mistakes represent failure and result in punishment	Mistakes are viewed as feedback; experiments are supported
Telling and selling	Testing, consulting and co-creating (<i>see page 15</i>)
Crisis management based on passive reaction	Strategic management based on proactivity and anticipation
Plan then implement	Plan and implement simultaneously
Forecast the future	Create visions of the future
Accumulate full information	Identify patterns in limited information
Isolate and analyse	Combine and synthesize
Little or no attention is paid to organisational learning	Organisational learning is seen as key to survival and success
Experts solve problems (unevolved old world organisation), or everyone solves problems (more evolved), or experts improve the whole system (even more evolved)	Everyone improves the whole system
Conventional meetings and conferences	Large group interventions
SLOW change	FAST change

Appendix IV

SOME USEFUL LARGE GROUP INTERVENTION RESOURCES

BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS

The Change Handbook—*Group Methods for Shaping the Future*. Editors: Peggy Holman and Tom Devane. Published by Berrett-Koehler. An excellent compendium of large group intervention methods. Well written and beautifully presented. Peggy Holman is a well-known figure in the international Open Space community.

Discovering Common Ground—*How Future Search Conferences Bring People Together to Achieve Breakthrough Innovation, Empowerment, Shared Vision and Collaboration*. Author: Marvin R Weisbord and 35 international co-authors. Published by Berrett-Koehler. ISBN 1-881052-08-7. The forerunner to the book *Future Search*, full of case histories and useful advice. Also covers Search Conferences.

Don't Just Do Something, Stand There—*Ten Principles for Leading Meetings That Matter*, by Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff.

Expanding Our Now—*The Story of Open Space Technology*. Author: Harrison H Owen. Published by Berrett-Koehler. ISBN 1-57675-015-9. The story of OST, from its inception in 1984 to the present, with a glimpse into the future.

Future Search. Authors: Marvin R Weisbord and Sandra Janoff. Published by Berrett-Koehler. ISBN 1-881052-12-5. A detailed guide to creating a Future Search event.

Gower Handbook of Training and Development includes *Creating Collaborative Gathering using Large Group Interventions*, a chapter written by Jack Martin Leith. www.gowerpublishing.com/isbn/9780566081224.

The Handbook of Large Group Methods—*Creating Systemic Change in Organizations and Communities*, by Barbara Benedict Bunker and Billie T. Alban.

Journal of Applied Behavioral Science—*Volume 28, Number 4. Special Issue: Large Group Interventions*. Editors: Barbara Benedict Bunker and Billie T Alban. (1992 - Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications.) Authors include Dick Axelrod, Kathie Dannemiller, Merrelyn Emery, Robert Jacobs, Donald Klein and William Passmore. Covers both theory and practice. Highly recommended. Available from Sage Publications: www.sagepublications.com.

Large Group Interventions—*Engaging the Whole System for Rapid Change*. Authors: Barbara Benedict Bunker and Billie T Alban. Published by Jossey Bass.

Open Space Technology—*A User's Guide (Second Edition)*. Author: Harrison H Owen. Published by Berrett-Koehler.

The Power of Spirit. Author: Harrison Owen. Published by Berrett-Koehler.

Productive Workplaces—*Organizing and Managing for Dignity, Meaning and Community*. Author: Marvin R Weisbord. Published by Jossey-Bass. The forerunner to the book *Future Search*. Essential reading for people who want to transform whole systems.

Real Time Strategic Change. Author: Robert W Jacobs. Published by Berrett-Koehler. A practical handbook to help you create Real Time Strategic Change.

The Search Conference. Authors: Merrelyn Emery & Ronald E Purser. Published by Jossey-Bass. A detailed introduction to the Search Conference method and the democratic principle of organisation design.

The Spirit of Leadership. Author: Harrison Owen. Published by Berrett-Koehler.

Terms of Engagement—*Changing the Way we Change Organizations*. Author: Richard (Dick) H Axelrod, the co-developer of The Conference Model (described elsewhere in this guide). Published by Berrett-Koehler.

VIDEOS

Search for Quality, a video of a Future Search conference convened by the Haworth Furniture Company. www.futuresearch.net/method/whatis/books_videos.cfm.

Discovering Community, a 45 minute video of a Future Search conference convened by the citizens of Santa Cruz County. www.futuresearch.net/method/whatis/books_videos.cfm.

PAPER

Rolls of white paper, 1.5 metres wide, 'Fabriano Accademia' brand, can be obtained from Atlantis European: www.atlantisart.co.uk.

WEB-BASED RESOURCES

Harrison Owen
www.ho-image.com

Large Scale Interventions
www.largescaleinterventions.com

Open Space Technology—general information
www.openspaceworld.org

Open Space Technology—training information
www.openspaceworld.com

Open Space Technology World Community
<http://openspaceworld.ning.com>

Open Space email list

There is a very active and extremely useful email list that you can subscribe to by following the instructions provided here: <http://bit.ly/bCSYfV>

ORGANISATIONS

Open Space Institutes

There are a number of Open Space Institutes, all of which are run as non-profit learning communities.

For more information, please visit www.openspaceworld.org

Future Search Network
www.futuresearch.net

About Jack Martin Leith



Jack is the developer of Creative Action, a methodology for transformational innovation.

A practising innovator, he has spent more than 20 years helping organisations conceive and birth products, services, experiences, facilities, work practices and other creations that generate maximum stakeholder value.

Jack's professional work in the fields of innovation and organisation transformation began in the early 1990s.

His clients range from small professional practices to global corporates, and from local government organisations to the European Commission. Former clients include ABN Amro, Department of Health, Diageo, European Commission, GlaxoSmithKline, A T Kearney, and McCain Foods. He was involved in Shell's acclaimed GameChanger innovation programme during its formative years.

Jack has lectured at University of Brighton, London School of Economics and London Business School, and is a former member of the governing council of the Association for Management Education and Development.

He has written for Organisations & People and other management journals, and contributed a chapter—Creating Collaborative Gatherings Using Large Group Interventions—to the Gower Handbook of Training and Development.

Jack Martin Leith

Email: jack@jackmartinleith.com

Telephone: 07582 598548 (+44 7582 598548)

Skype: jackmartinleith

Website: www.jackmartinleith.com

Twitter: @jackmartinleith