

## **AFTER THE DANCE**

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### **THE CHALLENGE**

The event was a raging success. The exhausted Design Team sits in a circle in the center of the empty room in order to capture the learning and impressions. Each tells a story of the experience as it was happening over the course of the project—selling the idea, putting the Design Team together, designing the event, managing logistics, and then the event itself. Stories emerge about the transforming conversations heard and about the changes occurring throughout the event. They are as thrilled as they are exhausted. They realize the long-term work has just begun. This event caused a shift in the patterns of organizational interaction, and the new patterns need to be supported and reinforced.

After confronting this challenge many times, our experience with multiple types of large group methods and the emerging theories of Human Systems Dynamics (HSD) has opened our understanding about what needs to be done “after the dance.” We have studied the ways that complexity influences the operations of Open Space (Owen, 2004; Owen 1997), Future Search, Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999; Watkins & Mohr, 2001), and Whole-Scale Change (Dannemiller et al., 1999; Dannemiller Tyson Associates, 2000). And we have a clearer understanding of what is essential to maintain the changes that follow.

Three fundamental conditions are required for self organizing systems that interact repeatedly and in complicated ways to generate unpredictable, patterned outcomes. We will describe those elements in the form of the CDE Model (Olson & Eoyang, 2001), followed by

application to four large scale methods. We will then demonstrate how the pattern set during the event can be amplified or dampened by pattern-setting activities that sustain the effects of change after the dance.

## **SETTING THE PATTERN**

When we facilitate large scale events, we are always amazed by the ways in which a diverse group of people come together and form meaningful relationships, shared understandings, and aligned commitments to action. We know that it happens consistently, but until recently we could not explain **why** it happens.

### **CDE Model:**

We have found that using a simple model to design, facilitate, and follow up large scale events has resulted in a shift in how our clients experience the results of their change process. Specifically, the CDE Model represents the three variables that influence a self-organizing process that shapes the emerging patterns, the speed with which they form, and the sequence of their development through time (Townsend, 2002).

The three factors in the CDE Model are the container ( C ), significant differences ( D ), and transforming exchanges ( E ). These three variables are intricately connected. If one of them changes, the others shift to adapt, and the emergent pattern changes, as well. The complex interactions of these factors are easy to see when you consider how the size of a room ( C ), diversity of participants ( D ), and mode of interaction ( E ) affect the patterns that emerge over the course of an engagement. Changing any one of the variables may have a profound (and unpredictable) effect on the others and on participants' experiences. All three of these variables affect patterns that emerge during large scale events and how those patterns might be sustained after the event concludes.

## **Container:**

The container ( C ) holds the separate individuals together long enough for a pattern to emerge. Many different elements might function as containers for a single group. The container can be psychological (for example, a visionary leader or fear of the unknown), physical (for example, a meeting room or national boundary), or social (for example, identity groupings or shared experiences). If there is not a sufficient container, a group wanders around, and energy and information are dissipated before they can coalesce into a new and more productive pattern. Containers are critical in effective large group interventions—the place, convening questions, and the time frame are among the constraints that can hold the system together until something interesting happens.

Each large group method depends on different elements to bring participants together. In Open Space, for example, individual passion serves as the primary container. In the course of the event, the circle and the convening questions form other containers that shape interactions and emerging patterns. Future Search dynamics are contained by the relatively small number of persons who are carefully selected to represent stakeholder groups of the larger system. That is why so much of the design time must be committed to deciding who needs to be in the room. If appropriate containers are not established to focus and concentrate efforts following a large scale event, it will be difficult to sustain the patterns of learning and action that emerge.

## **Difference**

Within the container, if everyone is the same, nothing novel will be generated, so significant **differences** ( D ) are the second critical condition for self-organizing in human systems. Differences provide the impetus for change and establish the shapes of emerging

patterns. Of course, any group of individuals will be different in an infinite number of identifiable ways: formal or informal power within the organization, work location, job role, longevity, or experience levels. Some of these differences may be irrelevant to a task at hand, so they can be ignored. Others, such as power or level of expertise, may be critical to patterns of the future, so they receive focus in the design and execution of an event. Participants' experiences, perceptions, and values are all differences that prove to be significant in almost every large scale event.

In the Whole-Scale Change method, the design team focuses on critical differences that influence the issues to be addressed, then they use these distinctions to plan for how these issues will emerge and also for a “maximum mixture of the whole” to ensure that diverse views are represented at each table and within the room. The principle is that each person has knowledge of a slice of the issue. As they meet together, each person, over time, will experience a shift in perspective and a new understanding of the greater issues of the whole.

Appreciative Inquiry, as its name implies, focuses on differences that are positive and encouraging rather than problem-based, so the patterns that emerge can be filled with energy and opportunity. All large group methods help participants identify and understand significant differences that can inform new insights and actions. Unless conditions are established to maintain these constructive differences beyond the event, it will be difficult to sustain the changes.

## **Exchange**

Unless connections are built across significant differences within the container, no change will occur. Transforming **exchange ( E )**, the third condition for self-organizing provides the connections that allow for change at the individual, team, and whole system levels.

In Open Space, each person is free to determine his or her own exchanges. Although people are expected to speak, listen, and reflect, they also participate in the concurrent dynamic of freedom to leave a group and join another at any time. The exchanges are driven by individual needs. In Appreciative Inquiry, the exchange includes a process of telling stories about a key incident. The stories help individuals transcend their own emotional connections and connect with a larger story that is being developed. The stories can reflect either times of great challenge and how the challenge was met or times of wonderful success and how that success is similar to that currently within reach of the group or organization. In Future Search and Whole-Scale Change, the exchanges are about learning enough about the system (either from experts or other participants) so that wise decisions can be made and actions can be taken. Though the methods of engagement are different among large group methods, each of them provides powerful ways for participants and stakeholder groups to engage with each other. And, unless the exchanges continue after the event, the patterns of change are not likely to persist.

## **LARGE GROUP METHODS AND HUMAN SYSTEMS DYNAMICS**

We have come to understand the dynamics of large group events through the study of complexity science and chaos theory and their application to the behavior of human systems. A body of theory is evolving called Human Systems Dynamics (HSD) that connects the nonlinear sciences with the social sciences and provides insights into the self-organizing behaviors of human systems (Eoyang, 2002; Eoyang, 2003).

HSD provides ways to think about self-organizing patterns in large scale methods and allows us to focus on how individuals change and learn at the same time an entire group is moving to new levels of understanding and action. Acknowledging that human beings are complex and their actions often cannot be predicted or controlled, Human Systems Dynamics

provides ways to understand and influence the process of self-organizing as it shapes patterns for individuals and groups. Summary analyses of four common large group methods (Open Space, Whole Systems Change, Appreciative Inquiry, and Future Search) are presented in Tables 1.

More detailed analyses are available on the web site at

[www.hsdinstitute.org/dept\\_press\\_publications.asp](http://www.hsdinstitute.org/dept_press_publications.asp).

**Table 1: CDE Model and OPEN SPACE**

Dynamics of Open Space: Amplify and absorb new energy and ideas that disrupt old patterns and allow new ones to form. Differentiation is the primary condition that drives change during the event.

PHASE	C	D	E
<b>Before</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal passion and responsibility draw participation</li> <li>• No limit to participant numbers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity of participants is key</li> <li>• Inviting question captures key differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invitation with question and logistics</li> <li>• Design team finding “right” question</li> </ul>
<b>During</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circle</li> <li>• Marketplace</li> <li>• Small circles for specific topics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Place, time and topics for small circles</li> <li>• All differences except passion and responsibility are dampened in the circle and the event</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals freedom (law of two feet, bumble bees, and butterfly)</li> <li>• Notes from small groups posted</li> <li>• Evening news</li> </ul>
<b>Emerging Patterns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boundaries around ideas become permeable.</li> <li>• Entry and exit into topic areas is based on passion and engagement; leads to commitment</li> <li>• Self organizing groups begin to form with ease</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slowing down of conversation enables those with different views to be heard.</li> <li>• Noise of the system generated by conflict shifts to learning through intense listening.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Honest sharing of viewpoints begins</li> <li>• Strong connections around passion form</li> <li>• Personal choice and freedom to engage is present</li> </ul>

**Table 2: CDE Model and WHOLE SYSTEMS CHANGE**

Dynamics of Whole Systems Change: Shared patterns (alignment) form by establishing clear boundaries and focusing on pre-defined significant differences. Exchange is the primary condition that drives change during the event.

PHASE	C	D	E
<b>Before</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leader takes significant role to bound scope and authority prior to Design Team meetings</li> <li>• Agenda shapes how the event will address key issues</li> <li>• Participants limited by size of facility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership Team alignment crucial prior to event—any difference among members will be magnified during the event!</li> <li>• Critical mass in number and diversity identified as those needed to sustain change.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design Team interaction reflects patterns of the whole—clue to what will happen and how</li> <li>• Complete logistical information (who, what, when, where) reduces anxiety</li> </ul>
<b>During</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Table members share responsibility by rotating leadership, facilitation, and recording equally.</li> <li>• Table discussions are recoded anonymously and capture all thoughts</li> <li>• Patterns for action emerge during whole room report out's.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voices of customer and stakeholder included</li> <li>• Reinforcing difference between individual dissatisfaction and organizational vision</li> <li>• Multi-dot voting of priorities help to converge on most important differences to be addressed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing reporting from table to whole room ensures system continues learning.</li> <li>• Individual domination of table is discouraged; time for introverts to be heard is provided.</li> <li>• Each exchange of data is designed to move the group from individual dissatisfaction to a greater vision for the whole</li> </ul>
<b>Emerging Patterns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activity across boundaries is opened for cross-functional action teams to emerge.</li> <li>• Blaming and judgment diminishes</li> <li>• System sees self more realistically because there is a greater knowledge of the whole</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data from the outside through voice of the customer, stakeholder or environment are recognized as strong influencers of current reality</li> <li>• Individuals are able to influence the whole through various methods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for the work of others increases due to greater understanding of form and function</li> <li>• Patience increases</li> <li>• Desire to improve the whole becomes evident through continued involvement efforts.</li> </ul>

**Table 3: CDE Model and APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY**

Dynamics of Appreciative Inquiry: Shared commitment is generated through establishing passion-filled exchanges that focus on shared perspectives embedded within stories that reflect assets and opportunities. Exchange is the primary condition that drives change during the event.

PHASE	C	D	E
<b>Before</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish interview protocol centered on issues provoking the system towards change.</li> <li>Pre-event data collection through paired interviews</li> <li>No limit to participant numbers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengths and assets are differences that make a difference</li> <li>Smaller groups work to discover and refine common themes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listening (vs discussion of) to the story teller fosters feeling of being honored and recognized as successful</li> <li>Talking and listening to stories slows the system down and opens door to deeper engagement</li> </ul>
<b>During</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dream emerges as the container for the work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual stories reveal different experiences</li> <li>Focuses on shared patterns rather than differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sharing of stories creates an emotional connection to <b>how</b> something was accomplished; what strengths were used for success.</li> <li>Voting process develops what is significant and has energy</li> </ul>
<b>Emerging Patterns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Story telling becomes a container for multiple experiences and connection based on similar emotions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rich visual and emotional connection occurs when sharing the best of an experience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on the positive expands the energy of the system</li> </ul>

**Table 4: CDE Model and FUTURE SEARCH**

Dynamics of Future Search: Diverse groups come together to establish a picture of a shared future. Shared container is the primary condition that drives change during the event.

PHASE	C	D	E
Before	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design Team decides who needs to attend (more than what the agenda should be)</li> <li>• Limited to 35-90 participants which includes stakeholder groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Event focuses on ensuring the different stakeholder voices are heard</li> <li>• Stakeholder differences are encouraged and accented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design Team discussions regarding who should be invited and design of the event.</li> </ul>
During	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific agenda and activities</li> <li>• Convergence built in with search for common ground</li> <li>• Activities focus on relationship between individual and whole group.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict is acknowledged but not worked</li> <li>• No experts or speakers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lots of small and large group “discussion” (vs reporting out)</li> <li>• Diverse activities provide multiple ways to engage.</li> </ul>
Emerging Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creativity around discovery of past, present and future lead to excitement to repeat the process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for the experiences of multiple stakeholders increases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thoughtful conversations at the system level focus on the whole rather than individual needs or parts of the system</li> </ul>

## CDE MODEL AND SUSTAINING THE CHANGE

In our experience, practitioners of all large scale change methods struggle with maintaining the patterns that are generated during the event. The CDE Model helps us consider what conditions need to be set during and following an event to lock-in the emerging patterns and continue the learning and change. The **containers** that set the conditions for the event must be reinforced to focus the attention and energy of the group and to perpetuate the new way of working. The **differences** that were discovered or reinforced during the event must continue to receive attention after the event concludes. **Exchange** is a condition that is common to all large group change methods, and it may be the most difficult to sustain following the event.

The special conditions that are set during the event help groups discover new patterns of interaction. However, when the event concludes, the boundaries of the convening container are dissolved and the pressure of historical conditions pushes for return. Because patterns are constantly forming and re-forming in self-organizing systems, the best way to maintain new patterns is to establish conditions that encourage their continuing formation.

We have found that patterns form around key issues that repeat themselves after an event. The following chart contains examples of what to watch for in pattern development after an event around the issues of relationship, communication, action, focus or strategic alignment, beliefs, leadership, learning, involvement and decision making.

**Table 5: Sustaining the Change**

PATTERN		Strategies
<b>Relationships</b>	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include discussions on what is working/ not working with relationships in meeting agendas.</li> <li>• Continue to loosen the container so relationship boundaries are permeable.</li> </ul>
	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continually connect across groups to ensure magnifying the differences that will make a difference.</li> <li>• Convene sessions where groups are mixed to broaden exposure to differences.</li> <li>• Watch for “groupthink” that indicates different views are being minimized or discounted.</li> </ul>
	E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure staff meetings match the pattern of conversations created during the event.</li> <li>• Create socials and celebrations to acknowledge the progress.</li> <li>• Consciously repeat the relationship connection/conversation from the event to after-event meetings.</li> </ul>
<b>Communication</b>	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use unusual or unexpected message approaches to keep awareness high.</li> <li>• Focus on understanding that the event as a small-scale version of the whole system.</li> <li>• Be aware of jargon and technical language that separate groups.</li> </ul>
	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occasionally send out a “radical” message to wake up the system.</li> <li>• Ask questions about differences as they emerge. Find respectful ways to focus on differences and make them more explicit.</li> <li>• Explore and amplify “noise” that is generated through the change. Does it help or hinder the process?</li> </ul>
	E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look at patterns of problem solving meetings and shift pattern to reflect the new way of interacting.</li> <li>• Repeat messages in many different contexts and to many different audiences. Compare and contrast how each message is received.</li> <li>• Contradict past communications methods: if tightly held, break the rules and open in creative ways; if loose, apply more consistency of time or message style.</li> </ul>
<b>Action</b>	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold topic-centered brown bag meetings.</li> <li>• Keep boundaries for projects clear and distinct (what is deliverable and by when).</li> <li>• Ensure cross-functional teams have decision making power.</li> </ul>
	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include resisters on project teams and hold them accountable for outcomes.</li> <li>• Acknowledge that employee skills and interests are varied, but the overall goal is common.</li> <li>• Define and track stretch goals.</li> </ul>
	E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report progress regularly to reinforce the pattern of working in connection with the intention of the whole.</li> <li>• When stress gets high, pick one thing to focus on and celebrate progress.</li> <li>• Provide emotional rewards for hard work and keep the critics at bay. Victories nourish faith in the changes.</li> </ul>

PATTERN		Strategies
<b>Focus</b>	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Couple Mission/Vision and address in all public meetings to ensure alignment.</li> <li>• Continually sift through new ideas for components that will impact rather than derail the focus.</li> <li>• Orient new group members to avoid distraction.</li> </ul>
	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in Stakeholder/ Voice of the Customer review meetings for input on progress.</li> <li>• Watch for homogeneous conclusions—support vigorous debate and dissention prior to decisions.</li> <li>• Define and focus on “significant differences” for a given project or initiative.</li> </ul>
	E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use systems and meetings to check understanding of connection to the part (individuals), the whole (teams), and the greater whole (divisions or organizations).</li> <li>• Provide a central point of virtual contact to make exchanges public and reliable.</li> </ul>
<b>Beliefs</b>	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider how intrapersonal dynamics affect decision making and action.</li> <li>• Test perceptions of how beliefs are being lived on a regular basis.</li> <li>• Use small groups to identify patterns of behaviors that are emerging and feed observations back to the system.</li> <li>• Help system move beyond the boundaries of personal views to see holistic perspectives.</li> </ul>
	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask the design team to consider how their beliefs change in the course of the project.</li> <li>• Provide space for the emergence and adaptation of beliefs, when the old ones are not working.</li> <li>• Distinguish between individual and group beliefs.</li> <li>• Explore distinction between lived and spoken beliefs.</li> </ul>
	E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask reflective questions so participants access their own assumptions and beliefs.</li> <li>• Hold regular discussions on beliefs and how they are being interpreted and lived.</li> <li>• Establish rituals that repeat on a regular basis.</li> <li>• Ensure that the voice of the “quiet” has space to get heard.</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership</b>	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a process for emergent leaders to join the conversation.</li> <li>• Develop a broad perspective of observation over time as well as short review cycles.</li> <li>• Conduct self-evaluations among leadership teams and share progress toward modeling the change.</li> </ul>
	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review assumptions about heroes and villains and align with current reality.</li> <li>• Individuals with stronger expertise invited to meetings to add rigor (vs opinion) to the shared information.</li> <li>• Pay attention to how power and authority are used after the event and encourage leaders to reduce power dynamics and meet others on equal ground, as they did during the event.</li> </ul>
	E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate interchanges with and among leader groups.</li> <li>• Encourage leaders talk to groups outside their reporting structures to demonstrate alignment of message.</li> <li>• Help develop a leadership voice with consistent and reliable messages.</li> </ul>

PATTERN		Strategies
<b>Learning</b>	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practice reflection to pause the system and assess the course.</li> <li>Regularly use tools learned during event that include listening for understanding, brainstorming, multi-dot voting, and shared leadership to ensure continued learning throughout the system.</li> <li>Establish communities of practice.</li> </ul>
	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review processes for voices of difference influencing planning and learning.</li> <li>Continue pattern identification and use this reflection tool as a feedback mechanism to the system.</li> <li>Determine which differences can be magnified or dampened by identifying what is significant, what needs to be kept as an anchor, and what needs additional time for learning from the “opposing advocate.”</li> </ul>
	E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold teach and learn sessions at the end of each project, publish lessons learned, and invite review.</li> <li>Keep records of decisions and actions to encourage learning from phase to phase.</li> <li>Use of different modalities (play, pictures, message boards, e-mail) in order to increase the understanding about what is happening.</li> </ul>
<b>Involvement</b>	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check for who is doing what and is it value-add to the focus and action.</li> <li>View project teams as containers for clear purpose, task, membership, resources and accountability.</li> <li>Clarify roles and responsibilities and check for understanding.</li> </ul>
	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rotate membership on teams to ensure fresh evolution of patterns.</li> <li>Allow for self-organizing teams of mutual interest, giving them responsibility and accountability for results.</li> <li>Provide multiple levels for involvement.</li> </ul>
	E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Celebrate progress often and in creative, public ways to reinforce the emerging, positive patterns.</li> <li>Stories from the event become mythical and create patterns of courage, trust, hope.</li> <li>Ask for feedback and respond immediately.</li> <li>Make documents public on shared web site.</li> </ul>
<b>Decisions</b>	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review decision making model with larger groups to ensure transparency.</li> <li>Establish a set of simple rules to guide decision making for continuing work.</li> <li>Use consistent decision-making process.</li> </ul>
	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check assumptions for how decisions are made and how conflict is resolved.</li> <li>Explore differences in opinion to reach better decisions.</li> <li>Consider disagreement to be a resource for understanding.</li> </ul>
	E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue transparency in decision making and ensure that challenges are aired.</li> <li>Articulate questions and issues clearly.</li> <li>Collect and analyze data to determine what is really driving decisions.</li> <li>When documenting and publishing decisions, ensure understanding of decision within context of entire change effort.</li> </ul>

## **Specific Applications**

Although there are many examples of the use of the CDE model during large groups, we have chosen three examples to demonstrate how patterns after the event developed and helped to sustain the changes.

**Container.** The focus of one organization's experience with Whole-Scale Change was to move out of their tight silos (C), suspicion between levels of management (D), and finger pointing (E) that manifested in a pattern of a risk-averse culture.

The desire was to open the container so there could be a culture of achievement orientation. The first step was to experience achievement in a large group, and the challenge became how to reinforce the new pattern. One way was to establish the strength and identity of a new pattern was based on the new cultural norms created during the event. To reach this goal, the organization conducted a mini survey about one norm each week. As employees logged onto their computers each Monday, they would answer team, department, and organization assessment questions about the norm of the week. Before employees could get into the system, they had to respond to the survey. All answers were collected by noon on Monday and were reviewed by the Leadership Team during their Monday afternoon meeting. Great work was publicly acknowledged and patterns of risk aversion were watched for and handled appropriately.

**Differences.** A contentious, multi-stakeholder system of forest management led to the 7<sup>th</sup> American Forest Congress. The event required one full year of planning, including Round Table meetings in each state to discover the diverse needs and views. At the four-day Congress in Washington DC, each of the four hundred tables was carefully designed to bring in as much

diverse ideology as possible. Special scholarships were established to ensure that all parts of the system were included: students, professors, environmentalists, tree harvesters, lumber companies, government, and labor groups. The high tension at each table was managed by having the first table discussion focus on the question, What will it take for me to stay fully present at this table? The commitments made during this initial session proved to override “special interest” movements that were attempted during the Congress. This initial breakthrough relationship among different stakeholders has been kept alive in diversely supported and ongoing state Round Tables. As the States continue to hold their involvement meetings, they ensure that there is a mixture of the stakeholders and that there is ample time for interchange about the different views. The result has been a broad based support for new legislation and changes in land management curriculum throughout the country.

**Exchanges.** Customer service was the orientation of one organization’s improvement effort. During their event, employees and customers discovered a common meaning and a joy in sharing what a good banking experience felt like. A Transition Team was appointed with one member from each of the forty bank branches to meet monthly to share stories of success. Those stories were then repeated back to the banks and the successes multiplied. One favorite story was about early staff meetings prior to the bank opening on Friday morning. Knowing that it was pay-day and the customer traffic would be high, the staff would stand in the center of the lobby and talk about what needed to be done and how to effectively deal with the volume of the day. A song from the event “We Will Win” would play in the background and the staff would often move to the emotion of the song. After a while, customers wanted to know what was going on and what the song was. So the staff set up an outside speaker for the song to play prior to the

bank opening on Friday's. Customers said they "loved waiting in line" on that morning because it was so much fun.

## **WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED**

Acknowledging the self-organizing nature of human systems has profoundly affected our understanding of the complexities of large scale events, how they are self-organizing, and the impact on individual and organizational changes they encourage. The principles of HSD have transformed the ways we market, design, facilitate, and follow up large scale events. Some of our key learnings are as follows:

- The pattern of the organization is disturbed when we enter the system. From the first conversation, we are influencing pattern formation. If we want to support patterns that will be sustainable, we have to be conscious from the beginning of how we are affecting the naturally occurring containers, differences, and exchanges.
- Complex systems are sensitive to small changes. Anything we do or say may shift the paths of self-organizing and the resulting patterns. We have to be consistent in our thought, action, and speech to avoid disrupting the system in unnecessary or unproductive ways.
- We recognize that the system will change itself, and we are merely there to help adjust the conditions. It will not take much to accomplish change, but our gentle pushing needs to focus on the conditions (container, differences, and exchanges) that will shape emerging patterns in the future.
- A simple, elegant solution that is implemented is much more effective than a complicated one that does not see the light of day. We try to plan the simplest follow-up activities and to support clients as they implement the activities completely and consistently.

- The dynamics of the group will sometimes establish productive patterns in spite of our intentions and efforts. Sometimes the most powerful and long-lasting changes are not ones we anticipated or designed.
- On a personal level, patience is critical because patterns need to emerge in the timing and rhythm of their own development. If we feel inclined to jump in and change the conditions, dampen the differences so they are less intimidating, or stop an energetic change, we need to STOP AND BREATHE DEEPLY.
- Most of all, we have learned that the learning never ends. Each event, each moment in an event, and all those that follow provide endless opportunities to expand our understanding and improve our action. We debrief our work and monitor the impact of the follow-up efforts based on the CDE Model. It helps us to stay focused on the simple, effective measures and encourages the system to learn how to influence its own destiny in a more conscious manner.

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