Introduction to *Participative Design for Participative Democracy*, 1993

Why a new edition within five years? The simple answer is the extraordinary rate of change in the field. Hidden behind this simple answer are new problems which have arisen directly from previous successes and some clear signals from the field as to where further clarity of concepts and methods is required. The changes between the 1989 edition and today's are an attempt to meet those problems and needs.

In 1989 I began the introduction to this volume by describing a new and major wave of activity to democratize organizations for more learning, multiskilling and productivity. That wave continues to grow, both in Australia and internationally.

One of the stimuli to further action on both the Australian and international fronts since 1989 was the Workplace Australia conference held in Melbourne, February 1991. With over 750 participants from many countries and designed to practice participation as well as to preach it, it was a first in many ways.

The overall event fell into three parts: workplace visits and discussions, twenty Search Conferences running in parallel, and a market place covering many different aspects of work reform. The site visits showed to the world some of Australia's achievements in this area. The twenty Search Conferences constituted the largest Multisearch ever tried, a rich case study. It generated a coherent vision of the desirable workplace (Thomson and Nash, 1991, pp 149-150). The market place allowed individuals and teams to participate from their own starting points, from sharing detailed experience of success, failure or progress with different approaches to just gathering impressions of what it all meant and how to get started.

With such a radical and idealistic design, there were shortcomings in all areas, as well as in the total event. The task of evaluation has begun (Thomson and Nash, 1991; Emery M, 1993), but there is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that Workplace Australia was a significant `learning event', inspiring to action.

It should be noted that these discussions are far from being confined to social scientists or consultants. Workplace Australia was remarkable in that academics and consultants formed a minority of participants. Now more than ever before, change is in the hands and minds of enterprises and unions, workers, and managers.

There are also new national parties entering the field. Turkey is a case in point, beginning later, but aiming to learn from earlier experiences and avoid some of the dead ends explored previously. At the symposium on National Participation and Consensus (sponsored by the Turkish Tusiad in April 1992), eight national models were presented and discussed.
Of these reports from countries which included such leaders in the field as Scandinavia, it was noteworthy that Australia was the only country that could document real progress. Diffusion towards democratization and revitalization have accelerated since the first Accord (1983), despite the longest economic downturn in two hundred years (Emery F, 1992). Change in Scandinavia appears to have foundered since the action research phase was replaced by the LOM program. LOM ostensibly aimed for diffusion by `democratic dialogue' based on the theories of Habermas, rather than on open systems or sociotechnical systems (Naschold et al. 1992).

Towards the `Learning Organization'

One of the most positive aspects of the new wave is the trend towards explicit recognition that the enterprise or workplace of the future is a `learning organization'. A learning organization is one structured in such a way that its members can learn and continue to learn within it. The organizational structure itself is an environment for continuing education.

It represents a fundamental transition from a bureaucratic, scientific management or economic rationalist view of people as instruments or cogs in the machine to the most genuinely human-centred appreciation of people engaged in productive activity. It goes straight to the core of being human, and that is our ability to consciously learn. It re-centres the debate about the purpose of this whole wave of change.

No previous theory has really homed-in so precisely on this unique gift of conscious learning, and the circumstances within which it is best developed to the benefit of all. Certainly, the Human Relations School acknowledged our nature as group animals and the Job Enrichment school got close with attempting to match the individual need for challenge and variety with individual job requirements. But it is only within the open systems framework with its supporting concepts of the organizational design principles and purposeful systems that a comprehensive practical theory has evolved to enable individuals and organizations to use the most effective methods to pursue the best possible development for both individuals and organizations.

To this point I have documented the good news. Unfortunately, rapid diffusion brings its own problems.

There are cases where action has outrun diffusion of existing knowledge. For example, some organizations have now invested heavily in participatively producing guidelines, consisting variously of statements of values, principles, philosophy, etc., stressing their commitment to adaptive relationships with their environments and to `continuous learning and improvement'. Many have made significant change within those guidelines. Some have achieved design principle 2 structures based on self-managing groups at the operational levels without any clear understanding of how to manage these. This problem is relatively easy to fix and it is particularly for these organizations that some of the new papers about design principle 2 management in Part II have been included.

Focusing on the Design Principles

More serious is another class of problem which expresses itself in different ways. It can be variously described as a disregard for, or failure to perceive concepts, an ever-present tendency towards fashions or names in good currency, or a tendency to assume that a specific is a general.

Some examples are discussed below, but the only effective answer to these symptoms of galloping action is to take the debates back to first principles, in this case the two basic principles for organization design. There is a direct analogy with mathematics if you understand the principles, you can solve problems without having to remember the formulae. If you understand the organization design principles, you can not only make systemic change without introducing dreadful inconsistencies and confusions, but you can also easily evaluate competing methods for introduction and see through trendy, superficial and confusion-generating fashions.

The Design Principles can be summarized as:

Design Principle 1, the redundancy of parts, results in an organization built on the one person one shift unit, where responsibility for co-ordination, control and outcome is located one level above where the work is being done.

Design Principle 2, the redundancy of functions, results in an organization built on self-managing groups who hold responsibility for their own work, their own co-ordination and control.

These principles are discussed in more detail in Part II. The following examples document lack of understanding of them.

Example 1. Recently the concept of `equifinality' has become a very trendy buzz word. Equifinality is the term taken from Bertalanffy to express the fact that in living systems, as distinct from inanimate systems, the final state may be reached from different initial conditions and in different ways (Bertalanffy, 1950; Emery F, 1981 p.89).

Equifinality is now being used to say that, regardless of what is done in a change process, `you will get there in the end'. Leaving aside for the moment the question of where `there' is, this sentiment is rapidly subjected to another logical slide to say in effect that all methods are equal.

We have here a multiple confusion. Equifinality has been distorted far from its original technical meaning to justify a range of clearly different processes towards an undefined end.

It has also become clear that recent widespread adoption of the term `work reform' is no accident (c.f. QWL). It expresses the fact that ideas about the desirable goal (getting there) are, in many quarters, very vague. This is also reflected in the fact that while Australia is changing rapidly, the success rate at the enterprise level is a very hit-and-miss affair. Without any idea of the design principles, this is understandable.

Unless some greater conceptual clarity is injected not only into debate but also into methods of introduction and implementation, Australia is going to waste a lot of time, energy and money. More than this, the failures and inefficiencies of muddling around are going to cast doubt once again on structural, organizational change and its relation to increased productivity. Despite the current momentum towards change, the advocates of bureaucracy will have a field day finding fertile ground for the view that dominant hierarchies cannot really be replaced.

Example 2. Participative Design or the PD workshop has been generalized from a specific method employing a specific set of concepts and tools to a class of behaviours for change which is in some way participative. Van Eijnatten (1992) in a comprehensive overview of Sociotechnical Systems Design (STSD) has interpreted PD to include a range of off-site/do it yourself workshops, union-management negotiation, new kinds of co-operation, the participative approach. He quotes personal communications about careful application of PD, but continues to confuse it with Search Conferences and a range of other participative methods (all quotes from pp 47-48). All of these are described as the Participative Design track of `modern STSD' (p.38).

To the end of re-introducing some clarity about the differentiation of methods, the original paper on the PD workshop has been substantially enlarged, with significantly more specific guidance for application. It has also been clearly differentiated from the original method of STS as practised in the experimental phase of the new paradigm (see Introduction to 1989 edition).

Example 3.We have in Part IV `Training Search Conference Managers', an example of how easily concepts in general and the organizational design principles in particular are lost if they are not known or recognized.

In an interpretation of the `mixed mode' (mixing the design principles in one event), Weisbord lost the concept of design principle. Through this loss he opened the floodgates to conceptual confusion and a pseudo debate about Searching and training. The result of this loss is that the Search Conference as a pure design principle 2 event, with its special defining characteristics, could become lost in the fog of `participation'.

Experimentation has long characterized this field, but there is a difference between careful and documented experimentation and a laissez-faire attitude towards concepts, methods and names.

There are two ironies here. First, the notion of Search Conference was the stimulus to Weisbord's book Discovering Common Ground (1992). Second, the confusion generated by Weisbord's loss of the concept of design principle only emphasises the need for training Search Conference managers, a need which Weisbord appears to dispute.

So now we have confusion piled on confusion. Van Eijnatten confuses the PD workshop as a method of structural change with the Search Conference. Weisbord loses the Search Conference as a design principle 2 method of participative planning in a grab bag of participative events.

When people lack conscious knowledge of the design principles, it is easy to see how they come to confuse participation with democratization, `participative management' with structural change.

These examples illustrate the major need for a revision of the 1989 version. There needed to be a much more concentrated focus on the organizational design principles as the central, most basic and guiding concepts of organizational and cultural change.

I hope that this flaw in the 1989 version has now been overcome. The paper `Participative Design' now includes a more specific and precise discussion of the design principles and their translation into organizational structures and methods.

For additional clarity I have also included the little papers `The Concept of TLC Trainer, Leader and Coach' and `The Differences between STS and Participative Design'. They address issues which are of vital concern in the current push towards change, but neither could be fully understood without awareness that workplace `reform' is about changing the organizational design principle. Clearly, those who are advocating a change in role for the supervisor from `cop to coach' do not have this awareness. Apart from the fact that STS is an inefficient, expensive method, it is also inappropriate for diffusion because it fails to educate about the design principles.

Other Differences

The major changes documented above are to be found in Parts II and IV. There are no substantive changes to Part I and Part III. The future context as spelt out in Part I remains an ideal, at the moment timeless. While there is minor experimentation with the ideas in Part III, they remain as a major area awaiting concentrated experimental attention.

In addition to the greater focus on the design principles in Part IV, I have also included mention of the flow-on effects from workplace democratization to the education system and the resistance to

changes in this system. Both of these areas are in their early infancy in Australia but may alert others to what they may expect when a change of design principle begins to take effect at the national level.

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