

REDESIGNING HUMAN AND GLOBAL SYSTEMS

A Conceptual and Strategic Framework

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Presented at the Academy of Management and Case-Western Reserve University Joint Divisional Conference on the Organizational Dimensions of Global Change, Cleveland, Ohio. May 3-6 1995

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About ten years ago, I moderated a forum on the use of Organization Development methods for global change at a conference on organizational transformation. The conference used Harrison Owen's "open space" structure (Owen, 1992) in which participants self-organize around topics of interest. When my forum convened there were about 10 participants, so I opted for an informal tone, starting with a round of self-introductions. I asked each person to state his or her interest in facilitating global change, and to briefly mention any current activities in that realm.

As we proceeded, additional participants began drifting in from other sessions, so that eventually there were about 35 of us. In the two hours we had allocated for our meeting, all we managed to do was to complete the round of self-introductions. To my surprise, these self-introductions were extended, detailed, and passionate. In recurring themes most people talked not only about their concern for global issues and dilemmas, but also about their own sense of powerlessness and loneliness in attempting to intervene at such a large scale, and their yearning for collegueship in these endeavors.

I noticed, too, that while the projects they described had a global focus, they generally involved participants in groups, communities, and organizations. In one way or another, I realized, everything we do has a multiple effect--on individuals, groups, organizations, and the world. Herb Shepard used to remind us to "think globally and act locally." I believe that, indeed, we *act* globally by acting locally; that the distinctions among these levels or scales of intervention are convenient but imaginary.

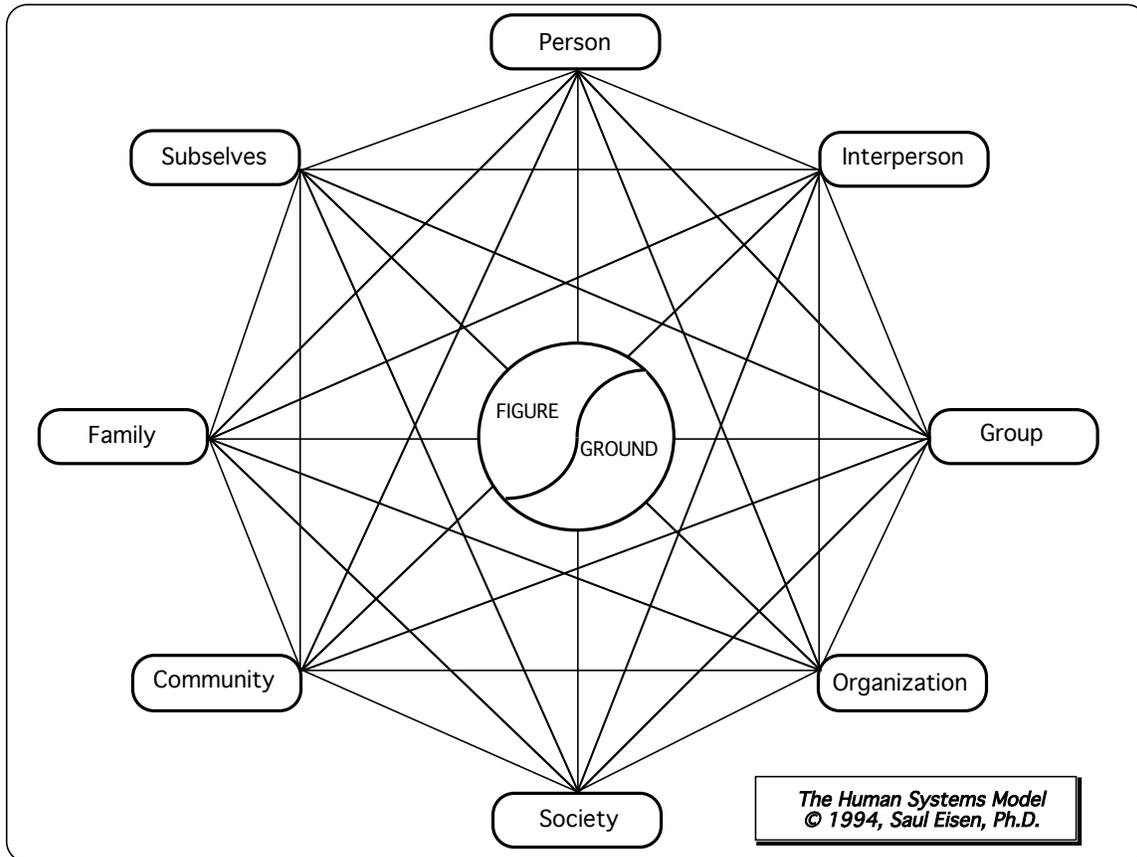
There is an inescapable wholeness in the global system. Whether we are working with individuals or trans-organizational domains, we can view each level of interaction as a facet of the whole. Furthermore, we need increasingly to maintain an awareness of multiple levels of intervention in order to make a real difference in the state of any system.

This paper is an attempt to summarize my emerging understanding of this multi-level framework for acting on the world. The Human System Redesign (HSR) framework guides my own practice with clients and my training and mentoring of new consultants. My intention is to propose it as a way of thinking about the work we do, and a guide for doing it effectively. At the very least, I hope it raises questions and sparks ideas; I invite correspondence about it from fellow human system redesign practitioners, social scientists, and students.

Part I. Structure

I think of Human System Redesign as an evolving synthesis of Organization Development (OD) and several related modalities for working with individuals, groups, organizations, and trans-organizational domains--including the global society (See Trist, 1985). By *human systems* I refer to a range of configurations of human beings--e.g., groups and organizations--interacting in a stable pattern around shared concerns or goals. I work with clients on how to *redesign* such systems to reduce the causes of recurring problems while increasing the system's effectiveness in achieving their goals, actualizing their values, and being appropriately responsive to their relevant environment. This emphasis on redesign

denotes an interest in going beyond solving current problems, and moving toward



changing the conditions that tend to create a recurring pattern of problems, or that limit the system's continuing self-improvement.

The HSR Model--Nested Human Systems

The structure of the Human System Redesign model is based on the Human System Development framework developed by Bob Tannenbaum, Fred Massarik, Newt Margulies and others (Tannenbaum, et.al., 1985) that considers organizations as nested structures of human systems interacting with other human systems: the individual, the group, the organization, and its environment. I have extended this framework by identifying eight levels of human systems that are relevant to the work of HSR practitioners:

1. The person as a whole individual
2. The person's own internal dynamics and sub-selves
3. The interperson, composed of any two-person relationship
4. The family
5. The group, e.g., work team, committee, department staff, etc.
6. The organization
7. The community of stakeholders in which organizations exist
8. The society of all human beings on the planet.

The core premise of the HSR perspective is that there is a complex interdependence among these levels; one cannot work on one without affecting and being affected by the others. Conversely, an effective consultation process requires a holistic awareness of that interdependence. One must use intervention strategies that

address the concerns and opportunities at several system levels on simultaneous tracks.

For the most part, each of these levels has been studied as if it were independent of the others. What follows here is a sketch of the roots, core concepts and methods at each system level. In Part II, I will consider how HSR practitioners can use this framework to facilitate stability and change in human and global systems.

1. The person. Much of psychology, and a good deal of the focus in related disciplines has revolved around the behavior of human beings as individuals, or as aggregates of individuals. The HSR model includes this perspective, with several qualifications and special emphases. The first is simply that this is one important-- *but not the only*--perspective. Further, I emphasize the mutual influence between the individual and each of the other levels in shaping and interpreting behavior.

Another important aspect of my focus on the person in HSR is based on the work of Carl Rogers (1951,1961) and its influence on the thinking and practice of many psychotherapists, consultants, educators, nurses, and other professionals. Rogers' way of working was originally termed *non-directive counseling*, and later called *client-centered therapy*. This terminology has further evolved to its current version, the *person-centered approach*. In essence, this approach is based on three elements: (1) the practitioner valuing the legitimacy of each person's own way of experiencing the world, (2) communicating non-judgmental empathic understanding of the person's experience, and (3) behaving authentically as a consultant, including clear and direct communication of the consultant's own relevant thoughts and feelings.

This approach rests on the assumption that each person has the capacity to make the best judgements and decisions about how to solve his or her own problems. The role of consultants is to help clients to clarify their own relevant goals, priorities, feelings, and behavior patterns so that they can make their own decisions about how to proceed. This way of framing the consultant-client relationship underlies Edgar Schein's (1969) definition of process

consultation with groups and organizations. In one of the seminal publications in OD, Schein distinguished between (a) the *expert consulting model*, in which the client purchases that person's technical expertise, (b) the *medical model*, in which the client gets a diagnosis and a prescribed solution, and (c) the *process consultant*, who joins the client as a partner in learning, problem-solving and improvement.

2. Subselves. I find it useful to consider the ways in which a person's interaction with family and work associates is matched and reciprocally mirrored by an inner world of sub-identities and related intrapersonal dynamics and structures. Several psychologists have developed and used models of the person based on a system of sub-identities. One can refer, for example, to Harry Stack Sullivan's (1953) *good-me, bad-me, and not-me*; Eric Berne's (1964) *parent, adult, child*; Stewart Shapiro's (1962) *ego states, superego states, and id states*; and Fritz Perls' (1951) *underdog and overdog*. An awareness of these structures and dynamics can provide both consultants and clients with a rich and useful perspective for understanding experience, behavior, and interaction.

The goal of therapy in working with subself systems is to bring to awareness the character, role, and function of each sub-identity, and to foster more coherent integration among all the subselves into a healthy and well-functioning personality. In HSR work, I include the possibility that the consultant and client can work together to understand the reciprocal influence between sub-self dynamics and other system levels. A more coherent integration among subselves and among system levels may be a worthwhile goal.

3. The interperson. Herb Shepard used this term to refer to the systemic entity composed of two or more individuals in relationship. If we think of relationships as interpersons, we can then consider those characteristics, structures, and patterns that define its *interpersonality*. The analog between personality and interpersonality can be a powerful one, both because of what it can highlight about the quality of a relationship, and also because of what it implies about the relationship aspects of

personality. Is the interperson extraverted or introverted? How much self-esteem does it have? Is it flexible and well-balanced, or is it rigid and dominated by some parts of itself at the expense of others? Is it open to experience of itself and to external information, or is it unaware of its own dynamics and closed to external influences? Is its energy used to develop and expand its capabilities, or is it characterized by internal conflict and depression?

Shepard (1965) proposed that the quality of relationships within organizations determines the organization's character. Relationships that are coercive, competitive, and distrustful hobble the organization's ability to function effectively and to be adaptive to a changing environment. The role of organization development, he said, is to guide a shift toward relationships that are voluntary, collaborative, and trusting. He referred to these two types of relationship as growing out of either a *primary* or a *secondary mentality*, respectively. Thus, Shepard conceptualized organization development as working simultaneously at these three levels--individuals, relationships, and organizations.

4. The family. While it is not usually included in models of organizational research and consulting, I believe family relationships and experience are an integral aspect of human behavior, both outside and within the work setting. The HSR model acknowledges the relevance and importance of the family, both as a historical antecedent to current behavior patterns, and as an ongoing (though usually unacknowledged) influence on the decisions and priorities of the participants in each of the other human systems.

Much of human behavior in organizations, for example, can be seen as a reflection of old patterns that were learned in the family. Co-workers aspiring for a promotion may engage in sibling rivalry with each other, patterned after their own early family experiences. Their competition may be mild and relatively appropriate to the organizational reality, or it may take on a meaning beyond the situation--generating strong feelings, distorted perceptions, and bizarre behavior. Similarly, the behavior of

a supervisor may be modeled after his/her own early experiences with parents and the role of authority in the family.

Decisions about company expansion or relocation usually have consequences for the family life of organizational participants. The family is thus a key stakeholder in such plans, though it is seldom consulted or even acknowledged in any formal sense. More and more, we are beginning to understand that the organization does not exist in a vacuum, and that ignoring the perspective and needs of stakeholders like the family only leads to unexpected problems. Some businesses are beginning to design company child-care programs and similar support services as a way to respond to these needs.

To assist in the redesign of human systems, one must consider the family as one important focus. The work of family therapy theorists and practitioners like Virginia Satir (1967, 1972) and others can be especially useful as a guide for working with family systems as well as other system levels. Following Satir's approach, the HSD consultant "creates a setting in which people can... take the risk of looking clearly and objectively at themselves and their actions." (Satir, 1967 pp. 160-177). The aim is to develop skills for clear and direct communication as well as improving self-esteem among all members of the human system.

5. The Group. This is one of the most thoroughly studied entities in social psychology and related disciplines--second only to the individual. As an important aspect of organizational behavior it has also been the focus of considerable research and experimentation.

Ever since the discoveries by Roethlisberger et.al. (1939) at the Hawthorne plant of Western Electric, we have been aware of the power of groups to influence behavior in organizations. The work of Kurt Lewin (1947) and his many gifted colleagues and students also highlighted the effectiveness of group discussion for changing behavior. Years later Rensis Likert (1961) proposed a model of organizations as interlocking groups connected by managers as linking pins. Almost all organizational structures

are composed of groups as building blocks--whether they are department staffs, functional groups, project teams, or self-managing teams.

Several of Lewin's students (Bradford et.al. 1964) were involved in the dramatic innovations that started in the late '40s at the National Training Labs in Bethel, Maine, and resulted in the use of T-groups or (at UCLA) sensitivity training groups for the reeducation of managers. The introduction of T-group methods into organizational consulting led to the use of team building as a powerful intervention to increase the effectiveness of task groups.

The team building method also built on the action research model developed by Lewin (1946). The consultant guides members of the group in generating data about how they are working together toward the group's task or mission. These data are fed back to the group and the problem areas thus identified form the agenda for facilitated work sessions in which the team works toward improving its own effectiveness. As more groups go through this process and then also address any intergroup issues, the effectiveness and adaptiveness of the whole organization improves. This has been the backbone of organization development for four decades, and more recently the basis for countless innovations and group-related approaches for improving organizations.

6. The Organization. This is the explicit focus for organization development, as is evident by its name. The field and the profession emerged from the realization, influenced by family systems therapy, that while T-groups could help individuals to change their behavior in dramatic ways, the back-home organization was even more effective at changing it back. This powerful homeostatic effect led T-group trainers and consultants to wonder whether organizations themselves could be changed in ways that support managers' newly proactive and collaborative behavior. Thus we can trace an evolutionary sequence in theory and practice--from developing managers, to developing teams, to developing organizations.

Underlying much of our work with organizations is an array of research findings and professional experience developed primarily during the last five or six decades in the fields of management, organization theory, and organizational behavior. These in turn are supported by more basic research in the behavioral sciences, especially social psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology. Managers and organizational consultants must be knowledgeable in areas such as organizational structure and design, power and politics, conflict and negotiation, motivation and reward systems, organizational culture, and leadership.

The importance of the organization level is, of course, rooted in the legal and financial role of the corporate entity--whether it is a business or a non-profit agency. In our society, it is the organization that hires and formally empowers managers and consultants. Individual managers and groups such as committees and boards are also involved in these activities, but only as agents of the corporate entity as a whole, guided by the requirements of the whole. This has tended to define the client-consultant relationship and has framed the consultant's work as *organization* development.

The emergence of OD and its prolific cousins and progeny (e.g., Socio-Technic System Redesign, Total Quality Management, Process Reengineering) have been part of a revolution in the practice of management and the facilitation of change in organizations. A rich proliferation of organizational behavior theories and management methods has emerged and multiplied, along with healthy debate about their respective merits and efficacy. But the ghost of systemic limitation haunts OD as much as it did T Groups. Effective as OD efforts may be, they are surprisingly vulnerable to shifts in the organization's environment. Emerging approaches, therefore, increasingly place emphasis on an expanded focus to include stakeholders like customers and suppliers, and an awareness of trends in the community and the globalized environment.

7. The Community. Every human system--person, group, organization, etc.--exists within a community of stakeholders. As an

open system it survives through a pattern of transactions with each of those stakeholders. A business buys supplies, hires people, sells products or services, establishes credit, sells stock, complies with regulations, etc. It survives, perhaps even thrives, on the basis of these transactions as negotiated with a community of stakeholders: vendors, customers, employees, banks, shareholders, and government agencies. As the environment in which organizations function has become more turbulent, managers have learned that they need to maintain the organization's relationship with key stakeholders. Four levels of attention are possible: denial, reaction, anticipation, and co-construction.

Denial is generally a disastrous strategy; except perhaps in unusual circumstances, such as monopoly, or the early implementation of a breakthrough technology, when everything one makes is sure to sell, capital is plentiful, etc. An organization that ignores its stakeholder relationships is not likely to survive long. Reaction is probably the most commonly used strategy. A vendor's price goes up, so the company begins looking for other vendors, or for substitute supplies. A product stops selling, so new sales efforts are employed to return to normal. This is a passive homeostatic approach.

Anticipation, on the other hand, is more of an active homeostatic approach. The idea is to monitor the organization's environment for emerging threats and opportunities so as to prepare adequately before they fully arrive. This is the premise behind strategic planning. Although more proactive, this approach is also generally homeostatic--seeking to maintain the balance and character of the enterprise in the face of environmental changes.

Co-construction, the fourth approach, is even more proactive. It seeks ways of engaging key stakeholders in creative negotiations aimed at improving the mutual benefits in each relationship. Often this leads to shared inquiry into the assumptions and premises held by the parties, leading to a fundamental reframing of the nature and structure of their relationships. The co-construction approach underlies newer processes such as dialogue (Isaacs, 1993), future search

conferences (Weisbord, 1992) and accelerated redesign (Axelrod, 1992).

This co-constructive approach is a fundamental premise in Human System Redesign, not only at this level, but for all system levels. The consultant facilitates transactions among all relevant stakeholders aimed at a consensual process of *deconstructing* the shared social reality and *reconstructing* a new, more coherent, mutually satisfying reality.

8. Global Society. We are becoming increasingly aware of the larger global society of all human beings on the planet as the ultimate context for everything we do. Business organizations can no longer ignore the intense competition from companies half a globe away that can often produce better quality at a lower price. U.S. companies are similarly aware of the immense potential markets emerging for their products and services in Eastern Europe, China, and Latin America. To ignore such possibilities is to be left behind, to be trampled in the dust of more assertive and globally aware competitors.

Similarly, we are learning the painful lessons of pollution and degradation of the environment. There is no longer any "out" to throw things to. Our own or our neighbors' practices that appear innocent and profitable in the short run are increasingly considered in terms of the longer term costs and damage they may create--to others and to ourselves.

Communication technologies are reducing distances and make any location on earth accessible; any source of information available; any potential market local. Internet links are giving us a foretaste of the information superhighways we'll be travelling in the near future. The distinction between what is local and what is global is beginning to blur as human beings across the planet are learning how they can and do influence each other, compete with each other, learn from each other. What happens to some of us affects all of us, one way or another. And so we are learning to consider as part of our consulting work--as much as any kind of work--the global implications of what we do, and the effects of global events and developments on our clients and ourselves.

The planetary society is the ultimate contextual level for all we do.

Part II. Application

Having described the basic structure of the Human Systems model (see Figure 1), I now propose to explore some of its dynamic aspects as well as some implications for facilitating change and stability in human systems. Specifically, I will address the following questions:

- What is the relationship between stability and change in human systems?
- How do system levels interact with and affect each other?
- How can this framework be used for understanding and intervening more effectively in human systems?

Change and Stability in Human Systems

Each of the eight human system levels--from subselves through the global society--has structural elements that provide continuity and stability. And each level is also a potential source of change--within itself as well as at other system levels. At the level of the individual, for example, the structure of personality is generally regarded as being formed relatively early and to be rather stable for life, especially in terms of its central elements. The person can and does acquire new skills and knowledge that can result in significantly new behavior, but the tendency to be introverted or extraverted, for example, is likely to persist.

At the level of the organization we can identify those patterns of corporate culture that are characteristic of an organization, such as valuing risk-taking and innovation, or a tendency to rely on hierarchy and authority to maintain control. New products or procedures may be relatively easy to develop and introduce, unless they are somehow in conflict with the organization's culture. When a major change program is implicitly at odds with the culture, it is often just absorbed and cancelled out--much the way a good boxer rolls with a punch.

Long-time members of the organization will confide that the new program is just some manager's current hobby horse, and that its main effect will be to create more paper work. If they all keep their head about it, they will survive the new program just as they have done with many previous ones.

In similar ways, the family, the work group, the community, etc., all have core characteristics that tend to be fixed and stable, as well as a capacity to respond to pressures and opportunities in their environment. A family may cut down on entertainment or vacation expenditures in response to reduced family income during a recession. By doing so, they are able to maintain their family structure. In effect, any open system survives by its ability to *change* some aspects of its structure or behavior in order to maintain *stability* in those areas that define its core identity.

There is thus a paradoxical relationship between change and stability in human systems. While change is carried out in the service of stability--as a means to that end--it is change that generates energy and attention. Its purpose, however, is often forgotten. An organization's mission and culture become the tacit context for day-to-day operations and tactical adjustments. In effect, there is a figure-ground relationship between operations and mission--between daily activities and culture.

Figure and Ground

The Gestalt psychology framework is useful in this context (Kohler, 1970). *Figure* refers to whatever aspects of perception or experience are currently in the foreground of attention, while *ground* refers to everything else around it. Ground serves as the context for the figure, and by its relationship to figure, gives it meaning. Ground can also be thought of as the source, from which figures emerge. A *gestalt* refers to a particular figure-ground configuration. Changes in either the figure or the ground, or in the relationship between figure and ground, result in a changed

gestalt--one that has a different meaning.

In a human system there is a tendency for attention to focus on its responses to pressure and opportunity, and to take for granted, even forget, those aspects that are stable. People in business organizations spend most of their time attending to day-to-day operations and tactical improvement efforts--working on how to maintain or increase sales, reduce costs, improve quality, etc. Only under unusual circumstances do we stop to consider questions such as what the core business or mission of the organization is, and whether that mission might usefully be modified. When people are invited to reconsider the organization's mission, their first response is often that they never thought much about what the mission was at all. The same is true for organizational culture. As the fish who are unaware of the water that defines their existence, we can be surprised to learn how our shared values and beliefs define our organizational reality.

Core characteristics of a human system thus tend to be both stable and unconscious. They are so important that the system works hard to maintain them intact. But their very importance leads to strongly held values and assumptions about them. They so define the system's sense of identity that there is no room for any consideration of alternatives. We assume that ours is the right--even the only--way to be, and stay busy with day-to-day events. Only when that core identity becomes untenable or is threatened in some way do we seem to wake up to its existence. And we often react with great energy--with either creativity and learning or anger and defensiveness--to such threats.

Behavior that is counter-cultural can evoke severe efforts to control, even punish. For example, a community may exclude people who seem different, and incarcerate law-breakers, even execute them in extreme cases. Depending on its particular culture, an organization may deny employment or promotion to

people who are not "team players," or those who are not sufficiently competitive and aggressive. A work group may ostracize members who produce too much or who deviate from other unspoken norms of behavior. A family may "ground" kids who break curfew rules or don't achieve high marks in classes. A couple may fight over a lapse in behavior that was tacitly expected, especially when it is related to basic values: "I know that if you really loved me you wouldn't have done that!" In each of these systems, the behavior and reaction to it are in the forefront of attention--the *figure*. The causes for the reaction--those tacit goals, values, and assumptions that frame and provide meaning for the behavior--are the *ground*.

Interaction Among System Levels

The gestalt of figure and ground can be formed either within a level, or between one level and another. When clients talk to us about the need to develop faster cycle time, the figure being presented is at the level of the manufacturing unit--let's say an assembly plant for electronic equipment. If we work only on that level we join the client in the frame of reference that created the problem. We may be able to help restructure operations within the plant to eliminate bottlenecks, miscommunication, and inefficiencies. But this approach is limited.

We can instead engage with members of the client system in a process of inquiry aimed at identifying the unspoken context for that problem, e.g., the community of customers who want better service and a faster response, competitors who have found a way to provide what our client doesn't, and suppliers whose policies and procedures limit the client system's flexibility. Members of the client system have not been able to resolve the problem because they are assuming that it must be solved internally within the plant, and that what customers, competitors and suppliers do is outside the field of play--out of bounds, and therefore out of mind.

But much like the creative problem-solving exercise requiring one to connect nine dots with four straight lines, the solution is only precluded by the limitations we assume to be there. And these are the most powerful and difficult limitations, because they are self-sealing: We have created them through an assumption we've made, and we are not aware that we have done so. As far as we can tell, we are behaving rationally and logically. Yet try as we may, we keep bumping against the same problematic limitations. We are caught in a false-logic trap; one that cannot be resolved from within the framework that created it. Only by shifting one's point of view, by standing outside the situation in some way, can the larger picture be apprehended--the whole figure-ground gestalt. This is probably the source of the most powerful contributions of any consultant--the fresh perspective of the outsider.

Using The Human Systems Framework

Four decades ago, Cartwright (1951) wrote about the tendency of "changes in one part of a group to produce strain in other related parts of the group" and to therefore precipitate efforts either to eliminate the change or to bring about readjustments in the related parts. He further quoted Lippitt (1949) as suggesting that "change should always involve three levels, one being the major target of change and the other two being the one above and the one below."

This is thus not a new formulation of the change process. And yet, this perspective may well be central to the emerging paradigm for Human System Redesign. Rather than a narrow focus on the organization or the team being developed, the HSR approach requires an inclusive, wide-angle view of the figural system and all the contextual systems that provide a meaningful background for it, as well as the relationships among them. This is especially crucial in change efforts that

touch core elements of a system, such as its personality or its culture.

System change can involve simple reactive adjustments in behavior or more complex proactive changes such as learning, changing work structures, or redefining the mission of an organization. In certain critical circumstances and with considerable effort, the fundamental character and sense of identity of the system may be transformed. *Simple* changes can take place at one system level with little or no effect on other levels; *moderate* change tends to have consequences for other levels, which must adjust and compensate appropriately; *fundamental* change reverberates at all levels, causing crises of meaning and function, and precipitating either reactive counterpressure to return to the previous state, or evolutionary leaps into new states of being and functioning.

When members of a human system experience difficulties and decide to ask for help, they tend to present the figure situation that is troubling them, and for which they have despaired of finding a solution. I believe that the work of HSR consultants is most aptly defined in terms of the assistance we may provide members of the client system to regain awareness of the ground within which that figure has emerged, and then to facilitate processes that generate new ways of construing and working with the figure situation, the ground within which it emerges, and the relationship between the two. This is the essence of the Human System Redesign process.

For consultants and managers involved in facilitating fundamental change, therefore, it is imperative to maintain an awareness of the ecological relationship among system levels. Every intervention at one level must be assessed in terms of its impact on adjacent levels. HSR must be managed as a multi-track, multi-dimensional process. At the very least, one maintains awareness of possible consequences on other levels. It may even be possible to develop the

capacity to intervene in such a way that positive or facilitative effects are felt at several levels concurrently.

This would seem to call for a super-human level of awareness and skill on the part of consultants. What really makes the HSR approach practical, however, is not the consultant's ability to manage and control the whole process, but rather the inclusion of all relevant stake-holders as equal co-facilitators of their own process. For what I am describing here is nothing less than the redesign or reconstruction of consensual reality--in other words, culture. And this, I believe, can only be achieved cooperatively and communally.

While it has been popular in recent years to focus on culture change in organizations, the results have often been disappointing or worse. Few interventions seem to rile people more than for managers or consultants to attempt to change their culture for them. The painful experience a few years ago at Pac Bell is only one example of this reaction. The critical error in such efforts appears to be the assumption that a command-and-control culture can change to an empowered culture by using command-and-control assumptions and methods. What HSR offers instead is an approach that uses consensual methods to facilitate the self-organizing evolution of culture. As suggested earlier, this involves processes that:

- Bring together relevant stake-holders within and across system levels
- Create a collaborative context for surfacing assumptions and considering the meaning and implications of other implicit aspects of the shared culture, including structure, technology, etc.
- Facilitate creative transactions and negotiations among stake-holders aimed at redesigning or reconstructing aspects of their shared culture.

Consultants and Leaders as Facilitators of Culture Change

A decade ago I conjectured about the possible emergence of a new field of professional practice aimed at working not only with groups and organizations but with the global meta-culture as focal client (Eisen, 1985). As I considered the historical evolution of organization development, tracing its roots to individual psychology, then group and family modalities of therapy, and the small revolution in management re-education created by T-groups in the '60s and '70s. I discerned a progressive sequence in which each new modality represented a successful innovation that grew like a new organism in a food-rich environment, until it reached a climactic stage and experienced its limits. At that point the focus shifted outward toward its contextual system: The family became the focus of study and intervention instead of the context for individual growth and learning. The T-group, then work teams and whole organizations emerged as the focus of intervention instead of individual management education.

The progression continued to lead outward. As organization development grew in its application and diffused as a technology for change, it began also to reach its contextual limits. Much could be improved within the boundaries of an organization; but the more that process succeeded, the more one experienced the power of customers, suppliers, funding sources, competitors government regulators, or technology innovators to limit or even wash away any advantage gained. Clients and consultants began to search outward into strategic planning and related approaches.

Once this sequence has been discerned, it is an obvious conclusion that the process leads continually outward until the wholeness of the global human society, perhaps even all of life on the planet becomes the ultimate client. I proposed that the primary locus for intervention become the shared (yet intricately diverse) human meta-culture of the global society. This work includes all the

social linguistic, and organization structures, interaction and communication processes, belief systems, artifacts and technologies shared by people on the planet, all the way down to intra-personal dynamics and sub-personality structures.

As a provisional label, I referred to this new field or profession as Meta-Culture Development. I suggested that it would have the following characteristics:

1. It is fundamentally integrative rather than divisive; this is not a new field, but rather a reframing of the historical and evolutionary development of the applied social and behavioral sciences. This new frame of reference does, however, highlight and empower the role of practitioners who facilitate intentional change and development at the level of culture.

2. The client is the whole bio-sphere, and every level of systemic organization below that, including individual human beings. The goals are to foster win-win problem solving and peace-making within levels and between levels, and to empower human systems at any level to redesign themselves in line with their highest values and vision.

3. As much as group facilitators make process observations about the group's here-and-now interaction and emotionality, metaculture development practitioners make observations about cultural process, e.g., myth, paradigm, and expressions of the collective unconscious. The field explicitly addresses contextual relationships and their significance.

4. As group facilitation includes the use of individual counseling skills, so does meta-culture development include the use of individual, group, and organizational facilitation.

5. The field is rooted in social science disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and

psychology, as well as in the facilitative professions such as counseling and psychotherapy, family therapy, organization development, socio-technic system redesign, and the newer transformational approaches. Its orientation is aligned with the humanistic and transpersonal views, as well as with the systems approach (Eisen, 1985).

Implications for the Practice of Human System Redesign.

Given this multi-level systems perspective, what are some implications for the way consultants and clients manage the redesign of human and global systems? What issues and questions are raised by this perspective? Here are some initial considerations:

1. Contracting needs to be even more thoroughly and flawlessly (see Block, 1981) conducted than in other forms of consulting. Managers who expect to use HSD to secure their command-and-control power will be disappointed. They must understand, instead, that they may gain a new kind of instrumental power, one based on being part of a more effective, adaptable, and satisfying human system. But along the way, they will likely experience some loss of control and some confusion and anxiety akin to culture shock. They will need to generate and maintain a high level of commitment to see the process through.

2. A sequence of activities may be planned, but it is very likely to change along the way in response to emerging events, contingencies, and shared discoveries. Instead of the familiar and apparently logical sequence of data-gathering, analysis, and problem-solving or redesign, there is likely to be a less linear, more iterative process of exploration, deliberation, and dialogue among people in multiple configurations. The paradox is that when assumptions and shared views of reality are being reconsidered, progress is likely to be experienced--at least at

first--as confusion, anxiety, and loss of meaning. Participants need to be prepared for this, and to support each other through the difficult times.

3. Working with culture requires a capacity to deal with issues and dynamics that are complex, subtle, challenging, and paradoxical. For example, how do we discover and work with the complex interrelation between organizational structure, compensation policies, group norms, interpersonal dynamics, individual beliefs, attitudes and feelings, and production technology? By what kind of (culture bound) criteria shall we judge the values we use to assess or improve any aspect of these activities? Our learning--as global change practitioners, as consultants, as managers, as members of self-managed teams, as family members, as vendors, creditors, customers--is only now beginning, and will need to continue.

4. Personal authenticity, openness to experience, and interaction process skills are even more important in HSR than in other intervention methods. In the rich soup of co-construction work, there is no "us" and "them," no distinction between subject and object; certainly no place for a consultant to hide. Whether internal or external, s/he is an integral part of the systemic wholeness. The capacity and willingness to be appropriately open about perceptions and feelings, and the skill in communicating directly and non-judgementally, are primary and requisite areas of competence.

5. Consultants need to expand their capabilities and to form consulting teams that provide complementary skill areas. Working on three or more levels simultaneously requires a heightened level of awareness, understanding, and skill. An intervention that leads to the creation of self-managing teams, for example, is likely to have unsettling as well as liberating effects on both the teams' former managers and the team members, even precipitating some degree of personal crisis for some. At the same time, the organization's reporting procedures, reward systems,

and control procedures will no longer be appropriate and will need to be fundamentally redesigned. This complex interdependence among system factors calls for an expanded array of competencies and a redefinition of the boundaries of specialization in professional education and training for consultants. We simply have to know more about more topics. We also need to form consulting teams representing a wide spectrum of knowledge and capabilities that can respond to the client system's multilevel issues and opportunities. HSR teams may need to be multi-functional and multi-skilled.

6. When the focus is on global issues as figure, all the other system levels must be viewed as relevant *ground*. The assumption that contextual systems are always larger is not necessarily required. We can consider any level of system as the ground out of which the focal system problems arise. Thus, when addressing issues of environmental degradation, for example, it is clear that organization policies of continual growth and short-term reward systems threaten the stability of the whole planet, and similarly that individual attitudes and beliefs about the planet as an endless storehouse of resources lead to destructive and wasteful behavior that imperils the planet. The same kind of effects may be identified at other system levels: e.g., relationships that are coercive, families that teach violence, communities that discriminate against or exclude people who are different, groups that enforce norms of authoritarianism and mindless agreement, or sub-selves that are internally abusive, fearful, or fragmented.

These all are relevant, multicausal factors for global concerns. Effective action and change at the global level, therefore, require comprehensive, coordinated strategies for negotiating and promoting change at all other system levels--change that raises intrapersonal awareness and personal integration, surfaces assumptions and beliefs, enhances cooperative attitudes

and relationships, promotes healthy and non-violent families, facilitates group development, creates more sane and stable organizations, and strengthens community values of inclusiveness and mutual support. The paradox is that we are powerless to change the world, yet everything we do affects the world. Human system redesign is a framework and a strategy for transcending that paradox by letting the world and its emerging needs change us and how we work together toward peace, sanity, and sustainable enjoyment of life on the planet.

A Concluding Note

This essay is more a beginning than a finished statement. I see in this framework the possibility of an integrative dialogue among all of us who work to improve the quality and the sanity of human systems. Whether we work with organizations as consultants, with individuals as psychotherapists, with students as teachers, with communities as leaders, or with people as people, we share the struggle to understand the complexity of multilevel human systems, and to facilitate those changes that will support human values in a sustainable and stable global society. To do this well we need, I believe, to enter a steep learning curve, because the needs and the challenges are growing exponentially. And we need to help and support each other in the co-constructive redesign of human systems at all levels in this fragile yet wonderfully resilient world.

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