Whole Systems Change

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What is whole system change?

Processes that engage people from all aspects of a system – organization or community to…

• Enable emergence of what is most important, individually and collectively;

and

• Increase the likelihood for achieving it by growing people’s capacity to care for themselves, others and the whole.
"We shape the story together"

Collective

Wisdom
"Among us, we have the knowledge and skills we need or know how to get it"

Shared Vision/Purpose
“We are doing something meaningful”

Communication
Public Information
“We shape the story together”

Being

Doing

Whole Person
“I can be myself; who I am matters”

Individual

Contribution
“I see what I can do”

“Change is a Process”

Systems View

“We continually learn and change together”

“We are doing something meaningful”

Wisdom

“Among us, we have the knowledge and skills we need or know how to get it”

Shared Vision/Purpose

“Public Information
“We shape the story together”

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Whole Person
“I can be myself; who I am matters”

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“Change is a Process”

“We continually learn and change together”
## The Shifts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Old assumption</th>
<th>New assumption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The foundation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision/Purpose</td>
<td>They own</td>
<td>We own, making meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution</td>
<td>I just do my job</td>
<td>What can I do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Person</td>
<td>They just want my hands/head</td>
<td>I can be myself; who I am matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisdom</td>
<td>They hire an expert</td>
<td>Among us, we have the knowledge and skills we need or know how to get it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The boundaries</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System</td>
<td>I know my part and that's all I need to know</td>
<td>I understand how we fit together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>That was a nice event, now back to the real work; flavor of the month</td>
<td>We continually learn and change together; how does this build on what came before and feed what comes after?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The center</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication/</td>
<td>Need to know; information oriented</td>
<td>Public; stories shape our understanding of each other and our world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# The fear and the potential

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The current state</th>
<th>The fear</th>
<th>The potential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy (pre-determined structure &amp; leadership)</td>
<td>Mob Rule</td>
<td>Differentiated whole (individual &amp; collective needs fully embraced)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The form
- **Stable---Rigid**: ??? - that's the fear
- **Fluid; self-organizing; connections via strange attractors**:  
  - Diagram: ![Strange Attractors](image)

### The focus
- **Order---control**: Chaos
- **Emergence**:  
  - Diagram: ![Emergence](image)

### What guides the whole
- **Service to the boss**: ??? - that's the fear
- **Service to meaningful purpose**:  
  - Diagram: ![Purpose](image)

### What guides individuals
- **Responsibility---Accountability**: Passion run rampant
- **Passion & Responsibility**:  
  - Diagram: ![Passion](image)

### The quadrants
- **Internal---External**
  - **Individual---Collective**
  - **Internal---External**
  - **Individual---Collective**
  - **Internal---External**
The Dynamics of Emergence

The focus of inquiry

REFLECTION

Individual reflection engages passion

Collective reflection engages connection

Discovery: the personal is universal

ACTION

Responsible action, with individual and collective purpose closely aligned

DIVERGENCE (also known as chaos)

EMERGENCE

CONVERGENCE

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How does it work?

Perception that all are equally human
(discovered through self-reflection)

Perception of a shared world
(discovered through collective reflection)

Perception of an open dialogue
(experienced through stepping into the mystery & speaking from passion)

-Solomon Asch, as interpreted by Fred Emery, through Marv Weisbord
Getting Started

Purpose: Theme & Intent

Stakeholders & Invitation

Process & Timeframe

Givens

What is not open for change? (Strategy, policy, legal, structural, process, financial)

Aspirations; Expectations for Outcomes

Strategy for Sustaining the Results

How will results be used? What degrees of freedom for action does the group have? How will you determine that the work made a difference?

What forms of communication, management will support people and their work?

Adapted from Larry Peterson, Larry Peterson & Associates in Transformation, 416-653-4829

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Evolution of Emergence

- Emergent ideas and relationships (new connections)
- Special projects (temporary structures and leaders)
- Self-managed teams (new structures, fluid leadership)
- Emergent organization and governance (fluid form, fluid leadership)
Change to what?

A system that consistently achieves what is most important to it, individually and collectively by…

continually increasing its capacity for emergence through…

people caring for themselves, others and the whole…

in service to a meaningful purpose
The Work

Ask great questions

Let go of the need for immediate answers

Name the patterns as you notice them

Pay attention to what’s emerging

Discovery:
the personal is universal

Take responsibility for what you care about

Welcome disturbances

Welcome silence in the collective

Invite the people of the system

Welcome disturbances

Ask great questions

Let go of the need for immediate answers

Name the patterns as you notice them

Pay attention to what’s emerging

Discovery:
the personal is universal

Take responsibility for what you care about

Generosity of spirit

Simplicity of design
(what’s one less thing to do and still be whole?)

Say yes, and…

Assume abundance

Give power away

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(what’s one less thing to do and still be whole?)

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Give power away

Invite passion & responsibility

Identify purpose that serves self, others & the whole

DIVERGENCE (also known as chaos)

EMERGENCE

CONVERGENCE

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CONVERGENCE
The Voice of the Devil

All Bibles or sacred codes, have been the causes of the following Errors.

1. That Man has two real existing principles Viz: a Body & a Soul.

2. That Energy, call’d Evil, is alone from the Body, & that Reason, call’d Good, is alone from the Soul.

3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

But the following Contraries to these are True.

1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call’d Body is a portion of Soul discern’d by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.

2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.

3. Energy is Eternal Delight.

William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 1789