John M. Bryson
Sharon R. Anderson
University of Minnesota

Applying Large-Group Interaction Methods in the Planning and Implementation of Major Change Efforts

Public policy makers, planners, and managers are increasingly relying on what might be called large-group interaction methods to involve large numbers of people (from as few as eight to more than 2,000) in planning and implementing major change efforts. These methods are structured processes for engaging large numbers of people to: (1) enhance the amount of relevant information brought to bear on a problem; (2) build commitment to problem definitions and solutions; (3) fuse planning and implementation; and (4) shorten the amount of time needed to conceive and execute major policies, programs, services, or projects. Proponents of such methods claim that they provide sets of concepts, procedures, and tools that can help public and nonprofit organizations and communities deal effectively with change. On the other hand, a number of boundary conditions surround the successful use of the methods. The authors compare and contrast seven approaches most frequently used in the public sector in the United States and abroad (i.e., Real Time Strategic Change, Search Conferences, Future Searches, Strategic Options Development and Analysis, Strategic Choice, Technology of Participation, and Open Space Technology) to illustrate their comparative strengths and weaknesses and to develop an agenda for research.

Introduction

Public policy makers, planners, and managers are increasingly relying on what might be called large-group interaction methods (LGIMs) to involve large numbers of people (as few as eight to more than 2,000) in planning and implementing major change efforts (Holman and Devane 1999). These methods are structured processes for engaging large numbers of people to enhance the amount of relevant information brought to bear on a problem; to build commitment to problem definitions and solutions; to fuse planning and implementation; and to shorten the amount of time needed to conceive and execute major policies, programs, services, or projects. Proponents of such methods claim that they provide sets of concepts, procedures, and tools that can help public and nonprofit organizations and communities deal effectively with change. We compare and contrast seven approaches most commonly used in the public sector in the United States and abroad (Real Time Strategic Change, Search Conferences, Future Searches, Strategic Options Development and Analysis, Strategic Choice, Technology of Participation, and Open Space Technology) to illustrate their comparative strengths and weaknesses and to develop an agenda for research. The methods we have chosen illustrate the range of methods available in terms of (1) their usefulness for dealing with differing degrees of mission, vision, and goal clarity; and (2) the differing sophistication of the tools they typically use for problem and solution framing and analysis.

John M. Bryson *is a professor of planning and public affairs at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. He also serves as the Institute's Collegiate Program Leader for the University of Minnesota Extension Service. He publishes and consults widely in the areas of leadership and strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations and communities.*

Sharon R. Anderson *is director of International Exchange Programs and associate director of the Reflective Leadership Center at the Humphrey Institute of the University of Minnesota. She has taught and consulted extensively with organizations and communities on "collective leadership," doing together what is not possible as individuals.*

We have chosen to focus on methods that do not necessarily require computer support for successful use.[1]

What are Large-Group Interaction Methods?

The intellectual history of LGIMs began in the middle of this century with the pioneering work on small groups done by Kurt Lewin in the United States and Wilfred Bion in the United Kingdom.[2] Lewin and Bion were reacting, in part, to the precepts and practice of "scientific management," an approach to organizational design and change identified primarily with Frederick Taylor and Henri Fayol. The role of the scientific management expert was to gather information and propose specific solutions to senior decision makers, who would then implement them. The workers themselves were viewed primarily as cogs in a machine designed by experts and run by senior managers. In contrast, Lewin and Bion highlighted the importance of gathering information and giving it to people—particularly to work groups—so they could solve their own problems. This led to a search for linked methods of gathering information and facilitating group problem solving. Subsequent theorists and practitioners associated primarily with the National Training Laboratories, the Tavistock Institute, and the field of organizational development have extended this work in a variety of settings and to larger groups.

The development of LGIMs had its beginnings in the 1960s, picked up speed in the 1970s, and blossomed in the 1980s. The LGIMs covered in this paper were developed primarily in the 1980s and are the best known in the public sector. Since the 1980s, a number of "hybrid" methods have evolved as practitioners and consultants have mixed and matched elements of the best-known methods to suit particular purposes, specific circumstances, and personal styles (Holman and Devane 1999).

All of these methods have the following elements in common: First, they involve large numbers of people, from as few as eight to more than 2,000 at one time.[3] Second, each is structured in specific ways (even when the method involves an effort to minimize structure) and involves high levels of participation. Third, a wide variety of stakeholders are involved. Fourth, single uses of a method typically last from a few hours to three days and can involve a series of workshops or conferences over time. Fifth, a skilled individual or team almost always facilitates the workshops. Sixth, extensive planning is involved, including gaining buy-in from key decision makers and opinion leaders. Seventh, an external process-design consultant and facilitator sketches the overall design and works with internal participants to fill in detail. (This may change as more organizations gain in-house expertise with the methods.) Eighth, major logistical issues must be addressed involving, for example, invitations, space, food and refreshments, audiovisual equipment, and information technology of some kind, such as word processing, graphics, or concept mapping capacity. And finally, substantial follow-up work may be needed to implement strategies and carry out action plans developed by LGIM participants.

Benefits and Costs

LGIM proponents assert that a number of benefits flow from the use of these methods. They typically claim that these methods: (1) are fast, compared with alternative approaches; (2) build buy-in and commitment from participants; (3) use dissatisfaction as a resource to prompt action on pressing issues or problems; (4) prompt participants to draw on their wisdom and experience, successes and failures; (5) tap participants' collective brain power, increasing the amount of intelligence brought to bear on an issue or problem; (6) get planners, implementers, and other stakeholders—in some cases, the whole system—in the same place to address the same issue or problem; and (7) help to build coalitions for politically feasible change.

On the other hand, several costs, risks, and cautions go along with using LGIMs. Among the most important are the following: First, the methods do not work if leaders are unwilling to share power and listen seriously to participants' views; instead, they must sponsor events, actively support them, and take the process and its results seriously. Second, LGIMs are unlikely to work if participants are unwilling to find common ground with one another. Third, LGIMs do not work when the events are not focused or are focused on the wrong issues or problems. Fourth, the issues or problems to be worked on must be important enough to motivate participation. Fifth, events must be well planned, managed, and facilitated, or they will not work. Sixth, LGIMs are not effective when the wrong people are involved, or if too few perspectives are represented to adequately address the issue or problem. Seventh, LGIMs can be very expensive in terms of participants' time, especially when the group is large, and in terms of money for consultants, logistical support, and facilities. Finally, extensive follow-up may be required to implement the strategies formulated or decisions made at LGIM events.

Special note must be made of the costs and benefits of skilled facilitation. None of the benefits of LGIMs are likely to be realized without skilled facilitation. Facilitation involves an increasingly widely appreciated set of skills that are designed, as the word indicates, "to make easier" the task at hand (Schwarz 1994; Bentley 1994). The LGIM facilitator helps groups reach their goals by designing an appropriate approach, facilitating the process, and providing useful advice throughout the process. The facilitator is

a *process* and not a *content* expert. Regardless of which LGIM is chosen, there are four elements to facilitation: (1) helping the group and its leaders clarify the content of the issues to be addressed; (2) designing a process to address the issues; (3) managing group interactions through the process; (4) and handling necessary logistics. Because LGIMs are relatively new, outside facilitation is often necessary to gain access to needed expertise in their use. The minimum number of days of outside consultants' time needed for a single use of an LGIM varies from one and one-half days for Open Space Technology to five days for Real-Time Strategic Planning.[4] The cost of external facilitation can range from minimal amounts, if volunteer facilitators are used, to $500 to $2,500 per day for highly skilled facilitators.

Why Now?

Before proceeding to a detailed discussion of specific methods, it is useful to ask why the use of LGIMs is growing so rapidly in many countries around the world—particularly in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, Scandinavia, Australia, Brazil, and elsewhere. There are several possible explanations. First, increasing pressure for responsiveness and accountability in the public and nonprofit sectors create a need to make plans, implement them, and produce results quickly. Getting all key stakeholders involved simultaneously, including planners and implementers, is one way to achieve these outcomes. Shared problem solving and participation can build commitment to plans and to implementing actions, and it can shorten the process of planning and implementation. Involving all key stakeholders can enhance legitimacy and accountability.

Second, there is a growing awareness that the world comprises various interconnected systems, and the system must be thought of holistically if any of its parts are to be acted on effectively (Schein 1971; Checkland 1981; Senge 1990; Wheatley 1992). This sense of the systemic context for action is captured in the phrase "think globally, act locally." LGIMs provide occasions and tools for systems thinking, in part by getting representatives of the various parts of the relevant system into the same room.

Third, another major reason for the increased use of these methods is simply that they have matured. The inventors and practitioners of these methods have been at it, in some cases, for almost 30 years. The inventors and their followers have had the time and experience to develop how-to kits of guidebooks, standard session designs, process guidelines and checklists, case studies, and, in some cases, supporting software. These materials have become "products" available for use, often by consultants. Because innovations typically follow an S-shaped diffusion curve (Rogers 1995; Lynch 1996), these products have now had the time to move along the curve, indicating a larger percentage of adopters. Now it is not just the avant-garde using these methods, but organizations and communities that are far more mainstream. Pragmatic participatory and communicative methods are now so widespread that they are considered as constituting elements of "planning's new paradigm" (Innes 1995).

Fourth, LGIMs typically require skilled process facilitation. Therefore, the use of LGIMs has been held back until fairly recently by a relative absence of skilled facilitators. As more organizations and communities use LGIMs, more facilitators have become available to spread use of the methods. Production of this talent also has been enhanced because the sheer number of skilled facilitators has increased in recent years. The supply of facilitators has increased because of (1) the development of facilitation as a field and the availability of more facilitator training courses; (2) the growth of organizational development (which often makes use of facilitation) as a field; (3) the increased demand for facilitated group processes such as, for example, Total Quality Management (TQM) efforts, team building, alternative dispute resolution (ADR), and participatory strategic planning; and (4) the re-tooling of social movement activists (see below). Many of the basic tools of LGIMs would be familiar to facilitators in general, and therefore it has been relatively easy to re-deploy the tools as part of a LGIM.

Fifth, another reason for the increased use of these methods is simply that they are challenging, intense, highly involving, and fun. People remember these events long after they are finished. Because people are working so hard and spending more time at work, there is a hunger for more meaning on the job. Being involved in the decisions that affect one's life can bring more personal satisfaction on the job. Some employees are even expecting to have "flow experiences" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) from their work. A flow experience is the state of mind that occurs when people are completely involved in their work.[5] High stress can burn people out if they do not have frequent flow experiences. In this sense, flow can be seen as an antidote to the stress of today's fast-paced work environments. LGIMs, at their best, induce a kind of flow experience in their participants, as both authors can attest based on their experience.

Sixth, there are moves toward democratization around the world. Part of this move is a desire to empower people and to enhance participation in workplaces and communities. The underlying belief is that better decisions and better citizens will result from involving more people (Pateman 1970; Boyte and Kari 1995; McSwite 1997). LGIMs typically are participatory and empowering and thus provide a kind of "technology of democratization."

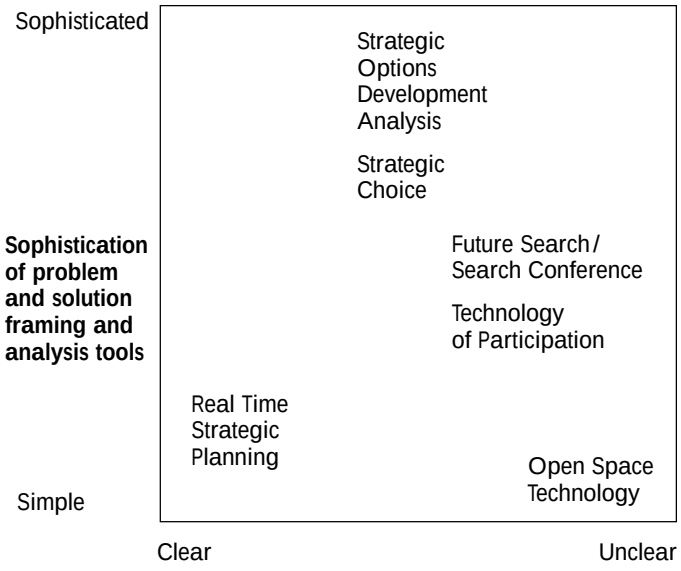
This move toward democratization is, in part, an outgrowth of the civil rights, environmental, women's, and other movements in the United States and elsewhere. Activists in these movements have helped develop practical methods for involving large groups of people in organizational and community action (for example Kahn 1982; Spencer 1989). Most of this work is highly pragmatic—both philosophically and practically—and has been produced in a stream *parallel* to the tradition of Lewin and Bion. There has been little crossover except, perhaps, for the work of the Institute of Cultural Affairs. Now, however, the two streams may join as authors and practitioners in each tradition become aware of each other's methods. The movements also have produced numerous organizers and facilitators who later applied their skills to other situations and provide a pool of talent to be drawn for using LGIMs.[6]

Seven Large-Scale Interaction Methods in More Detail

In these sections we present, compare, and contrast seven LGIMs. Our methods illustrate the range of methods available in terms of (1) their usefulness in dealing with differing degrees of mission, vision, and goal clarity at the outset of LGIM use; and (2) the differing sophistication of the tools that are needed to work out what needs to be done, how it should be done, and why, in terms of articulating and achieving the organization's or community's mission, vision, and goals. We focus on methods that do not typically, or necessarily, require computer support for successful use. Figure 1 presents a matrix based on these two dimensions and indicates roughly where we believe each LGIM fits in relation to the others. The figure also indicates the situations in which we think each method is likely to be most useful.[7]

The matrix shows that Real Time Strategic Planning (RTSP) is most useful when mission, vision, and goals are fairly clear, and when simple framing and analysis tools are needed to make progress. In contrast, Open Space Technology (OST) is most useful when mission, vision, and goals are very unclear and very simple framing and analysis tools are needed. Technology of Participation (ToP) is best when there is some clarity on mission, vision, and goals; it relies on somewhat more sophisticated tools than does Real Time Strategic Change (RTSC). Future Searches (FS) and Search Conferences (SC) also assume at least some clarity on mission, vision, and goals, while they tend to rely on more sophisticated framing and analysis tools than ToP. Strategic Choice (SC) and Strategic Options Development and Analysis (SODA) work best when there is mid-range clarity concerning mission, vision, and goals and fairly sophisticated framing and analysis tools are needed. SODA has a somewhat more sophisticated analysis tool kit available than does SC. Computer software support is available for both methods.

Figure 1
Suitability of LGIMs: Mission, vision, and goal clarity and sophistication of tools



It is important to keep in mind the conditions that are necessary for successful use of all of the methods: First, they should be used to address only significant issues that require a broadly based shared understanding of the issue and commitment to do something about it among key stakeholders.[8] Second, they should be used only when strong process sponsors support and provide legitimacy and authority for their use and are willing to take the process and its results seriously; when strong "process champions" (Bryson 1995, 215–17) are there to keep the process on track, often from behind the scenes; and when enough skilled facilitators are available. Third, they should only be used when participants are willing to find common ground with one another. Fourth, they should only be used when adequate attention can be devoted to event planning, management, and follow-up, including how to use the LGIM to focus on the right issues by having the right people involved. Fifth, they should be used only when most of the important information needed to address the issue will be present somewhere in the group of LGIM participants, though not every person necessarily will have the information at the start. Sixth, participation and involvement are increased when there is pressure to shorten the time frame for planning and implementation of a change effort. Finally, it is highly desirable to have resources available to implement the event's results prior to beginning the event; however, in certain circumstances an event might be used to develop a resource-acquisition strategy. Finally (perhaps this should go without

saying), LGIMs should be used only when the expected benefits exceed the likely costs. These conditions indicate that use of LGIMs is likely to be relatively infrequent for any single organization or community.

We now present the seven methods in more detail. We begin with a brief overview of each method, offer a quick description of a typical event, and discuss the major strengths and weaknesses of the method. Event descriptions will vary because some methods are organized by days, others by steps, and still others by phases. This discussion is summarized in Table 1, which also lists the minimum external consultant requirements for a single event.

Real Time Strategic Change

Real Time Strategic Change is a process principally identified with Kathleen Dannemiller and Robert Jacobs (Jacobs 1994; Dannemiller Tyson Associates, Inc. 1994). The process fuses strategy development and implementation in real time, thus speeding up and smoothing out the change process. RTSC brings the leaders and staff of an organization together to develop a common picture of the present, to explore and agree on a future vision, to make shared commitments to what needs to be done differently, and to develop strategies to accomplish it. Typically, the process is used to refine and develop actions for a set of goals and strategies that have already been developed in broad outline by the organization's leaders. The process thus links "top-down" direction with "bottom-up" participation, validation, and action planning. The process is designed principally for intraorganizational use, but it can be adapted to interorganizational or community use.

RTSCs guiding principle is that "for change to occur, the product of *dissatisfaction* with the present situation (D), a *vision* of what is possible (V), and *first steps* to reach the vision (F) must be greater than *resistance* to change (R); in other words: D x V x F > R" (Jacobs 1994, 122). The principle comes from Beckhard (1969) and probably applies to all LGIMs.

Event Description. Events typically last three days and involve 50 to 2,000 participants. On the first day, activities focus on assessing the organization and its environment and clarifying the organization's mission. The day begins with a welcome and introductions, and the event's purpose and logistics are discussed. A set of related activities follows: (1) an environmental audit and trends, including use of an external panel of experts; (2) an organizational diagnosis, focus in on what is working and what is not working; (3) brainstorming a list of "glads, sads, and mads" from participants' work experiences; (4) celebrating the diversity in the system and understanding different ways of looking at the world; (5) reviewing and confirming or questioning the organization's mission, vision, values and key strategies; and (6) evaluating the first day.

The second day starts with a confirmation of the organization's mission and values, perhaps modified by the first day's work. Then a set of activities designed to develop strategies for change takes place. These include: (1) hearing from key "customers" about what is happening and what they need in the future; (2) creating pictures of success and identifying what needs to happen to achieve them; (3) identifying processes, procedures, and policies needed to ensure the shared vision; (4) identifying key issues that need to be addressed to make the changes happen; (5) having each participant select a small group to work with on a specific key issue, including analyzing the current situation and making recommendations for change; (6) having top positional leaders (such as top organizational managers and union officers) work privately to agree on what they will support; and (7) evaluating the second day.

The third day moves toward agreement on specific strategies and actions. The day starts with positional leaders stating what they will support. Then work occurs in the following areas: (1) building a common vision of success; (2) identifying norms that need to be changed or strengthened; (3) meeting in actual work unit groups (as opposed to self-selected groups) to further explore key issues and action plans; (4) developing strategies to include people who did not participate and to ensure that the direction created during the three days will be acted upon within the "back-home realities"; and (5) evaluating and wrapping up the third day.

Strengths and Weaknesses. RTSC has several strengths. It is a highly participatory approach to gaining buy-in to goals and strategies and to producing action plans, where the goals and broad strategies typically are decided by senior decision makers and action plans are produced by implementers. The process is designed to expand participants' vision (especially lower-level participants) and uses a well-documented process to produce action plans. The processes' principal weaknesses are that it depends on highly skilled facilitation and logistical support; it is costly in terms of participants' time; and it is unlikely to result in major bottom-up strategic change. Also, while there are many testimonials to the effectiveness of the method, we are aware of no carefully done, published research studies to verify the point. This last criticism applies, more or less, to all LGIMs.

The Search Conference

Search Conferences (SC) are two- to three-day events designed to develop a shared long-term vision, achievable goals, and action plans around an issue of common concern. An SC is a participatory, democratic strategic planning method that, like RTSC, seeks to speed up responses to changing environments and develop cross-

functional collaboration. Unlike RTSC, goal formulation is an important part of the process. SCs try to build commitment, initiative, and innovation among people throughout an organization or community and teach people how to design and redesign their work in a changing environment. The method grows out of the sociotechnical systems theory and practice work of Eric Trist and Fred Emery (1960) and is most clearly articulated in Emery and Purser (1996).

Event Description. SCs typically take two to three days and involve 15 to 60 people. (Larger numbers can be involved by running "multi-searches"—that is, several search conferences run parallel or sequentially.) Participants are selected based on their expertise, knowledge of the system, influence, and ability to implement conference outcomes. All work is shared and open; no private writing or sharing of ideas is allowed. The SC has four phases.

In the first phase, participants share their perceptions of changes over the past five to seven years. In the second phase, the environment is "appreciated" by focusing on the system's past, present, and future. This occurs in three steps. In the first step, participants tell their stories about critical events, key issues, and changes that have occurred. In the second step, people identify ways to improve the current system. Finally, in the third step, participants work in small groups and develop a list of key elements for the system in the future. Groups report back and all conference participants agree on strategic goals.

In the third phase, the final phase of the conference itself, constraints are addressed and groups of participants select a strategic goal and work in self-managed teams to develop action plans. The fourth phase, which occurs after the conference, focuses on implementation and usually includes changing the organization's ways of working.

Strengths and Weaknesses. SCs have several strengths. They have an impressive track record on several continents, and they have been used in public, nonprofit, and business settings, both intraorganizationally and in interorganizational or community settings. SCs have a reasonably well-articulated theoretical base in sociotechnical systems theory. The method seems to inspire people to find common ground and a future focus, and to agree on joint action. Devoting a full day to developing action plans is a plus. Finally, there are published, well-documented descriptions of the method in practice. However, there also are some weaknesses. As with all the methods, expert facilitation is required and there are significant logistical requirements. The method is expensive in terms of participant's time. This method also does not necessarily involve external stakeholders, other than those responsible for implementation—which may be a strength, but also might be a weakness.

Future Search

Future Searches (FS) bear a strong resemblance to Search Conferences—in part because of a shared theoretical base in sociotechnical systems theory, and in part because the FS originator, Marvin Weisbord, has been directly influenced by the Emerys. FSs are most clearly described in Weisbord and Janoff (1995). FS events typically take all or part of three days—half of the first day, all of the second day, and half of the third day—and involve 30 to 85 participants. Participants represent a cross-section of the organization or community. Their purpose is to design an organization's or community's desirable future and to formulate strategies to bring the desired future to life. Participants manage the work themselves and are expected to take responsibility for their agreements.

Event Description. FS events break down into three phases: past, present, and future. The events use a democratic process of stakeholder participation with no designated experts. There also are no specially-trained small-group facilitators. In the phase focusing on the past, the overall task is to review the relevant history (personal, organizational, community, and world) over a particular period of time through the use of participant-created time lines. People look at the time lines and tell stories, working to help each other understand how they and others fit into a larger picture.

The phase addressing the present begins with the task of examining the organization's or community's current reality and the issues affecting it. The group then selects seven to 10 of the most important factors affecting the organization. The third task takes place in small groups and involves discussing each of the priority trends in more depth, including what is currently being done about the trend and what people would like to do in the future. A discussion of "prouds and sorries" is the fourth task. This is a time for participants, who are organized into stakeholder groups, to talk about what they are proud of and what they feel sorry about in relation to the issue or conference theme. The intent is to examine the system as a whole and to assume responsibility for what has and has not occurred.

In the phase focused on the future, participants work in diverse groups to brainstorm visions for the future. Groups present their ideal future scenarios and then work to identify common themes, potential projects, and unresolved differences. The final step is to develop action plans for the common themes and to discuss how participants will continue the work following the conference.

Strengths and Weaknesses. The strengths of the FSs are similar to those of SCs. FSs also have been used extensively on several continents, and in public, nonprofit, and business settings, both intraorganizationally and in interorganizational or community settings. FSs draw on

much the same theoretical base used by SCs. The method seems to inspire people to find common ground and a future focus and to agree on joint action. The half-day full-day half-day format seems to work well. Finally, there are published, reasonably well-documented descriptions of the method in practice (Weisbord et al. 1992). The method has the same weaknesses as the SC.

Strategic Options Development and Analysis

Strategic Options Development and Analysis (SODA) is a method developed by Colin Eden and Fran Ackermann (Eden 1989; Eden and Ackermann 1998).[9] The method is based on personal construct theory (Kelly 1964), social interactionist sociology, and operations research. It has one of the best-articulated theoretical bases of the LGIMs. SODA is a method particularly well suited to working on complex problems because of its use of "concept maps" to make sense of problem areas and to figure out what might be done about them. The maps consist of action-oriented statements linked by arrows, indicating influence relationships among the actions. "Arrows in" to a concept indicate what it would take to make something happen, while "arrows out" of a concept indicate the consequences of taking the action. These concepts are ordered hierarchically into statements that indicate possible missions, goals, strategic issues, and actions to deal with the issues. A dialogue process is then used to agree on the actual mission, goals, strategies, and actions that will be used to deal with the problems of concern.[10] Maps of small groups or individuals are integrated into a larger group map. The process attends to both content and process aspects of the problem and seeks to build consensus and commitment to act.

SODA workshops typically involve up to 24 people, making the groups among the smallest used in LGIMs. Larger groups of up to 200 can be used, however, often involving sequential, parallel, or crossover construction of maps by subgroups and then merging them into one large map. Maps can become very large, including upwards of 2,000 concepts. Computer support, either using *Decision Explorer* or *Group Explorer* software, is necessary to manage and analyze larger maps.[11]

SODA workshops typically take two days, but they can last as little as two hours. During workshops, groups may construct a shared map from scratch, or they may work on a map that has been fitted together from individual maps developed during a pre-workshop interview process. If a map based on separate interviews is to be used, considerable advance preparation is necessary.

Event Description. SODA workshops usually proceed through a series of steps. If a composite map has been prepared in advance, the facilitator provides an overview of key goals, important issues, major options, and assumptions as a backdrop or context for the specific issue being addressed. Participants are invited see their own concepts in relation to the concepts of the other participants. The group then focuses on the individual issues and clusters that emerge, often aided by the analytical capabilities of a special software package called *Decision Explorer*. Dialogue is encouraged to deepen the understandings and insights. Opportunities for action are identified, along with areas where further analysis is needed, such as financial modeling, simulation modeling, market research, and statistical analysis. Relationships among the issues and clusters are examined within the broader context of all the concepts in the map. Commitments are sought to specific missions, goals, strategies, and actions. Finally, an agreed-upon system of reviewing progress and staying on track is developed.

Strengths and Weaknesses. SODA has been widely used in the public, nonprofit, and private sectors in the United Kingdom, and it has recently begun to be used in the United States (Bryson 1995; Bryson and Finn 1996). It has one of the best-articulated theoretical bases of all the LGIMs. It also provides the best "problem structuring"—that is, careful articulation of exactly what the problem is and what can be done about it—because of its reliance on concept mapping. The *Decision Explorer* software provides a powerful data management and analytic capability for handling large amounts of qualitative data. This method, along with Strategic Choice, provides the most balanced attention to both content and process issues; the other LGIMs pay less direct attention to content and provide few tools for dealing with it. There are two main weaknesses of this method. First, it is important to have a facilitator skilled in concept mapping and, if it is employed, in the use of the computer software. Second, the maximum number of participants in a mapping session is about 24, although multiple groups can be used and the resulting concept maps merged. This means that the method is typically used with relatively small groups and not with entire organizations, although entire organizations can be involved using a multiple-workshop format.

Strategic Choice

Strategic Choice (SCh) is designed to help participants manage uncertainty and cope with complexity in interconnected problem or decision areas. The purpose of the approach is to promote strategic decision making in these areas. Participants are encouraged to move incrementally through a series of exercises to articulate the content of a set of interconnected decision areas and to choose appropriate courses of action. As with SODA, the process attends to both content and process aspects of the problem and seeks to build consensus and commitment to act on preferred solutions. The approach is identified principally with John Friend and Allen Hickling (Friend and Hickling

1987, 1997) and is used most extensively in the public sector in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Latin America, typically as a method for fostering interorganizational collaboration. Because the approach has developed primarily out of years of trial-and-error practice, it does not have a well-articulated theoretical base (Bryson, Ackermann, and Eden, forthcoming). A software package called *STRAD* can help manage the content of the process (STRAD 1996), although in most applications of SCh the software is not used.

The approach focuses attention on managing of three types of uncertainty, each of which calls for a different kind of response. These uncertainties pertain to the working environment, guiding values, and related decision areas. Like SODA workshops, SCh workshops typically involve no more than 24 participants. Larger groups can be used, however, by having multiple subgroups work in parallel and then using plenary sessions to bring small groups together.

Event Description. The process of strategic choice moves through, and back and forth among, four modes of activity and suggests methods or techniques suitable for each. Many of these methods are graphics-based, and therefore require facilitators and sometimes participants to have graphic representation skills. The modes include: (1) the shaping mode, which looks at concerns about the structure of a set of decision problems; (2) the designing mode, which focuses on concerns about courses of action; (3) the comparing mode, which attends to the consequences or other implications of different courses of action; and (4) the choosing mode, which addresses concerns with commitment to actions over time.

The approach uses four operational guidelines focused on technology, organization, process, and products. The technology is designed to allow people to interact and participate as fully as possible. The suggested organization involves small groups of up to eight participants to combine informality and diversity of perspectives, and to allow for active participation by all. In other words, both the technology and organization are designed to foster interaction. Larger groups can be involved by combining the work of small groups in plenary sessions. The process involves managing time and opportunities for interactive learning across the four work modes (shaping, designing, comparing, choosing). The products include recommended actions, policy changes, and "invisible products" such as changed outlooks, perceptions, and appreciation of the views of other participants. The operational guidelines are thus quite similar to those of other LGIMs.

Strengths and Weaknesses. SCh provides excellent "problem structuring"—that is, careful articulation of exactly what the problem is and what can be done about it—because of the size and variety of the techniques and tools it has at its disposal. A particular strength is its attention to the differing kinds of uncertainty. The use of the *STRAD* software provides a data management and analytic capability for handling complexly interrelated quantitative and qualitative data, if that becomes necessary. The method, along with SODA, provides the most balanced attention to both content and process issues. SCh shares two main weaknesses with SODA. First, it is highly dependent on skilled facilitation; in SCh's case, it is particularly important to have a facilitator with some graphic ability, as well as the ability to use the *STRAD* software, if it is employed. Second, the maximum number of participants in a session is about 24, although multiple groups can be used and plenary sessions held to merge the work of subgroups. This means that typically the method is used with relatively small groups, and not with whole organizations, although with careful management and support entire organizations, multiple organizations, or communities can be involved through their representatives. A third important weakness is that SCh, unlike SODA, does not have a well-articulated theoretical base.

Technology of Participation

The Institute for Cultural Affairs has developed an approach it calls the Technology of Participation (ToP), which it has used in large group events throughout the world (Spencer 1989). Events may include from 10 to 200 people and can last from two to seven days. ToP includes methods of event planning and orchestration; encouraging participation and elicitation of group insights; and focusing group conversations. The goals of the approach are similar to those of other LGIMs: to encourage participation as a means of getting people to take responsibility for their organizations or communities; to speed up planning; to produce plans that get implemented; to bring together a diversity of perspectives; and to build team spirit.

Event Description. ToP events follow a five-step approach that focuses on answering five different questions.[12] The first step involves developing a common, practical vision by answering the question, "What should our organization or community look like in five years?" The second step focuses on analyzing the underlying contradictions or barriers, both internal and external, to achievement of the vision. The relevant question is, "What stands in the way of realizing the vision?" The third step sets strategic directions by answering the question, "What activity will resolve the contradictions or overcome the barriers and make the vision a reality?" The fourth step focuses on designing actions that will implement the vision. The operant question is, "What specific actions will implement the strategic directions?" The final, or fifth, step involves drawing up an implementation time line. The question to be answered is, "What steps are required to implement each action, and how will they get done, where, by whom, and when?"

Strengths and Weaknesses. The strengths of ToPs are similar to those of SCs and FSs. ToPs have been used extensively on several continents in public, nonprofit, and private settings, both intraorganizationally and in interorganizational or community settings. A particular strength is the use of simple technologies for eliciting and clustering ideas according to related themes.[13] The attention to articulating barriers and overcoming them, along with the emphasis on action planning and building commitment to implementation are also strengths. Finally, there are published, reasonably well-documented descriptions of the method in practice (Spencer 1989). The method has the same weaknesses as SC and FS. In addition, the theoretical base on which ToPs draws is not well articulated.

Open Space Technology

Open Space Technology (OST) is principally identified with Harrison Owen and builds on the traditions of the Kpelle people in Balamah, Liberia, and certain Native American tribes. OST is the least structured of the LGIMs, though it shares the same goals of most of the other methods—namely, to create whole-system organizational or community change by getting as many members of the system involved in the same event. The idea is to bring together and unite diverse groups of people around a topic of shared interest, address their issues and concerns, and achieve major change. The unstructured nature of the method, however, places the burden for creating agendas and self-organizing on the participants, and changes the facilitator's role to someone who "holds the space" so that participants can do their work. Facilitator interventions are minimal. The potential for tapping people's creativity and energy may be greater, while logistical demands are less. The unstructured nature of the process, however, can be very frustrating to participants and may increase the chances of failure.

The assumptions underlying this method are worth exploring in more detail. They include the following: (1) Events must focus on an issue of concern, and when the purpose becomes clear, the appropriate event and project structures will follow as a natural expression or embodiment of the purpose. (2) People can and will self-organize based on their interests. Everyone has the right and responsibility to put items on the agenda. Everyone has creative potential, and his or her energy can be tapped. Groups will generate their own leadership. (3) Experts and analysts are needed among the participants. There should be no expert help from outside the group. And (4) you can work with the chaos of these events. It represents an opportunity for growth, organizational learning, and improved effectiveness.

These assumptions embody a very optimistic view of people and change. The belief is that good things will come out of getting people together to address issues of mutual concern and that relatively little advance planning and logistical support are necessary. There is a kind of "whatever will be, will be" philosophy behind the method, and a belief that whatever happens is okay. The assumptions and philosophy are both the major strength and weakness of the method.

Event Description. Events can involve up to 500 people over one to three days. Most of the process involves a set of freewheeling discussions around topics of mutual interest, with participants coming and going as they please. The opening session covers a number of ground rules that embody the approach's assumptions and philosophy. In particular, the "Law of Two Feet" is observed—namely, that participants have the right and responsibility to use their feet to go to a productive and meaningful conversation or place for themselves. There also are four principles: (1) Whoever comes are the right people. (2) Whatever happens is the only thing that could have. (3) Whenever it starts is the right time. And (4) whenever it is over, it is over.

The process does follow a set of steps. Step one involves opening the event and describing the process. Step two is agenda setting. In this step, participants determine what they want to accomplish, preferably stated in the form of question focused on something that is real and that people are passionate about. People with agenda items to propose state the theme of the item, describe the process to be followed, create a "bulletin board" to which other participants might contribute, and "open the marketplace" to all who come to contribute. Step three is called "open space." In this step, participants engage in any conversations they wish, moving about the room from conversation to conversation (or bulletin board to bulletin board) when they feel like it—that is, following the Law of Two Feet.

Step four can happen at any time and consists of announcements. (If it occurs during the morning, it is called "morning announcements.") This is a short session to bring people up to date on what has been happening and to announce future activities. Step five occurs at the end of a day and is called "evening announcements." This session is for group announcements, reflection, and a time to have some fun and to tell stories about what happened during the day. Step six is a time to celebrate the group's accomplishments. The celebration is not planned in advance (other than perhaps providing some music) and draws on the talents of the group. The group can do what it wishes—sing, dance, play musical instruments, offer testimonials, and so forth. Step seven is a formal closing. This is a time for participants to express what they have done and intend to do. The step is meant to be simple and serious. The closing includes the announcement of commitments and next steps, and listening to participant reflections about what the event has meant to them. The final step includes making formal

reports available. Rather than report on sessions, the formal reports contain all of the participant-created task force reports. During the conference, each task force is responsible for recording their proceedings. A written report is then available as people leave the conference.

Strengths and Weaknesses. OST has been used in public, nonprofit, and private settings, both intraorganizationally and in interorganizational or community settings, to help participants find common ground and agree on an agenda for action. A particular strength of the method is its reliance on participants organizing themselves and setting their own agendas. As a result, the logistical demands and demands on event facilitators are less. Finally, there are published, reasonably well-documented descriptions of the method in practice (Owen 1991, 1997a, 1997b). There also are some weaknesses. As with all the methods, expert facilitation is required and there are significant logistical requirements. The necessary facilitation is different, however, from the other methods, in that facilitators are mainly required just to "hold the space" and intervene as little as possible. This is a hard role for many facilitators to play. And, of course, the method is expensive in terms of participant's time. The theoretical base on which OST draws is not well-articulated. The method also does not necessarily involve content experts when they might be needed. The method is probably best for creating ideas, not necessarily action.

Conclusions and Implications for the Future

Use of LGIMs is becoming increasingly common, and we expect that they will soon become standard practice in the public and nonprofit sectors (Holman and Devane 1999). The methods engage significant numbers of people for relatively short periods of time to gather large amounts of information about problems and solutions, build commitment to problem definitions and solutions, fuse planning and implementation, and shorten the time it takes to develop and implement major policies, programs, services, projects, or other changes.

A particular strength of the methods is their ability to foster broad-scale participation on the part of key stakeholders to deal with important issues. As a result, when used appropriately, the methods may provide important means for enhancing the legitimacy, efficacy, and effectiveness of public action generally, and of public administration specifically. For example, the methods provide group process technologies for fostering collaboration and partnerships across organizational and other boundaries. They also provide a group process technology for engaging citizens, in particular, in public work (Boyte and Kari 1996; McSwite 1997).

On the other hand, those interested in using LGIMs, should first explore whether the necessary conditions for successful use (discussed in a previous section) can be met, and whether the potential benefits of using an LGIM are greater than the potential costs. In making this calculation, one must also factor in the consequences of outright failure and consider the necessary pre-planning and mid-course corrections that might be needed to avoid failure.

It is important to select the right LGIM based on the level of mission, vision, and clarity at the start of an LGIM event, and based on the sophistication of the tools needed to frame and analyze problems and solutions. We have argued that the seven LGIMs discussed in this paper differ in their usefulness based on these two dimensions. Beyond that, however, it is important to keep in mind that because the demands of situations can vary a great deal, and because facilitators vary in their knowledge and abilities, the actual LGIM that is used in practice is likely to be a hybrid of some sort. That explains, in part, the proliferation of types of LGIMs in recent years (Holman and Devane 1999).

We have seen many different kinds of LGIMs work very successfully, often in very difficult circumstances. On the other hand, because relatively little careful, comparative research has been done on which methods work best under which circumstances, little can be said with absolute certainty about how best to use them. It is clear that each of the methods reviewed has been quite successful at times, but the evidence is primarily anecdotal. There is a real need for carefully done, longitudinal, quantitative and qualitative research studies to clarify the comparative strengths, weaknesses, and conditions governing successful use of each method.

One of the difficulties in researching LGIMs is that it is hard to say precisely what each of these methods is in practice (Eden 1995). Each method comprises a fairly complex collection of concepts, procedures, tools, and techniques. Each involves a system of interacting roles for various stakeholders. Most require highly skilled facilitation, which adds even more complexity to a particular method, as each facilitator adds a particular twist to the LGIM in practice (Cropper 1990). Therefore, a first step in researching LGIMs is to codify clearly what each is. Several inventors or users of particular LGIMs have made this easier by providing what are essentially user guides (Spencer 1989; Jacobs, 1994; Weisbord and Janoff 1995; Emery and Purser 1996; Eden and Ackermann, forthcoming; Friend and Hickling 1987, 1997; Holman and Devane 1999).

Another difficulty in researching LGIMs is that the theoretical bases for each approach need to be articulated better. Some of the developers have been careful to articulate the theoretical bases underlying the method; for example, Eden and Ackermann, the developers of SODA (Eden and Ackermann 1998) and Emery and Purser, who are among

the developers of the Search Conference (Emery and Purser 1996). But most LGIMs have been developed by practitioners who are less concerned with clarifying the theory supporting their methods. As a result, many LGIMs work in particular circumstances and do not work in others, but it is not clear why. Another reason why the theory behind most methods is difficult to articulate is that each method is necessarily interdisciplinary. Each draws or touches on various aspects of psychology, sociology, social psychology, organizational behavior, operations research, adult education, planning and management, human resource development, and intercultural communication. Each of these fields thus has something to contribute as we try to better understand these methods.

Since these methods are so facilitator-dependent, it is particularly important to explore the role(s) of the facilitator in each LGIM carefully. In spite of the increasing importance of facilitation, remarkably little scholarly work has been done on the nature, requirements, and skills of facilitation.[14] There is a lot of "craft knowledge" about what makes a good facilitator. We need to know more in a scholarly sense about what makes a good facilitator and why. And then we need to learn how to train them better.

Finally, we believe that these methods should be taught—in addition to researched—in schools of public affairs and administration. At present, the majority of these methods are being taught by their advocates outside of the academy. We believe that the more these methods are taught in academic settings, the more likely we are to learn in a comparative sense what works, under what circumstances, and why; then we can offer academically rigorous understanding and training in the use of the methods. The world of practices has shown that LGIMs clearly can make a contribution to enhancing the legitimacy, efficiency, and effectiveness of public administration. Significant academic teaching and research work is needed to help make the most of that promise.

Endnotes

1. We thus have not included, for example, System Dynamics Modeling or Decision Conferencing, both of which typically require the support of sophisticated computer software (see Eden 1992). In relation to Figure 1, system dynamics modeling would be in the middle in terms of mission, vision, and goal clarity, and at the very sophisticated end in terms of tools used. Decision Conferencing generally works best when mission, vision, and goal are clear and uses sophisticated multiattribute utility analysis tools to make resource-allocation decisions among or across policy options with which to pursue the mission, vision, and goals.
2. See Bunker and Alban 1997, 11–27, for a good overview.
3. For our purposes, a small group has fewer than eight members, and a large group has more than eight members. This is an arbitrary distinction, but skilled facilitators know that group dynamics often seem to change when a group has more than seven members; a different dynamic tied to size begins to emerge.
4. The minimum number will increase with the need for advance planning, the number of LGIM participants, and the need for follow-up work. The minimum numbers do not include the need for any required external consultants expert in the content being addressed.
5. In "flow" experiences, people are focused; the activity is enjoyable; there is a sense of involvement in something outside everyday life; there is goal clarity with clear feedback; the challenge of the situation is in balance with available skills; there is a sense of serenity as time almost seems to stand still; and intrinsic motivation is high (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).
6. For example, the authors of this article began their professional careers as community organizers in the late 1960s and now work as process facilitators in a variety of settings.
7. The written materials on these LGIMs are often vague about some of the more important points for comparison, such as the precise purposes for which the methods are useful and the boundary conditions on the uses of each. Our presentation, therefore, must be viewed as a preliminary account. A fuller treatment awaits development of a more complete literature on each LGIM.
8. LGIMs are useful in situations that Thomas (1993) defines as requiring public consultation or public decisions.
9. The method has recently been further developed by Eden and Ackermann into an elaborate and intellectually ambitious strategic management process called "journey making." Journey making includes a number of elements in addition to SODA (Eden and Ackermann 1998).
10. SODA may be viewed as a potentially powerful strategic planning tool; see Bryson 1995, 257–75.
11. Special audiovisual equipment may be used to project a large map onto a screen so the group can work on the map interactively. If computer support is involved, dual facilitation may be necessary, with one facilitator managing the group process and one managing the computer support. Two special software packages have been developed to support mapping. Decision Explorer allows for entry of concepts by the computer support person; the other, Group Explorer (Eden and Ackermann 1997), allows direct entry by participants.
12. See also Bryson (1995, 33, 139–42).
13. See also Bryson (1995, 93–95).
14. For good treatments of general facilitation, see Schwarz (1994) and Bentley (1994); for good discussions of facilitation in relation to LGIMs, see Eden and Ackermann (1998) and Holman and Devane (1999).

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Table 1 Assumptions, strengths, weaknesses, and key features of LGIMs

Approach	Assumptions	Strengths	Weaknesses	Key features
Real Time Strategic Change Key resources: *Real Time Strategic Change: A Consultant Guide to Large Scale Meetings,* Dannemiller Tyson Associates, Inc. *Real Time Strategic Change: How to Involve an Entire Organization in Fast and Far Reaching Change,* Robert Jacobs	Change occurs at a fast pace, in real time, and simultaneously throughout an organization. Planning for change must be fast, and common approaches are not effective or fast enough. People who are affected by change should be involved in its planning and implementation. Change is everybody's business. Buy-in, commitment, and ownership of a change effort are natural by-products of involving people. People are more apt to support change when they see it in the broad view of the organization's reality. The leadership team and consultants have power and responsibility.	Provides a step-by-step how-to process. Expands people's visions while also resulting in action steps. Develops broad strategies, goals, objectives, and action plans. Highly participative approach to gaining buy-in to goals and strategies and to producing action plans.	Facilitators in small groups are often assumed to be trained and not given training. Unlikely to result in major "bottom-up" strategic change because the process design is strongly influenced by an organization's leaders and their goals. Requires major logistical support or effort. Needs skilled facilitation. Takes considerable participant time.	Number of people involved: 50–2000 Duration: Three days Staff needed: Design team Logistics team Facilitator Minimum requirement for external consultant if internal expertise is not available: five consultant days. Sequence of activities: 1. Environmental audit and industry trends 2. Organizational diagnosis 3. Brainstorm "glads, sads, and mads" 4. Review organization's mission 5. Hear from key customers 6. Create picture of success 7. Identify processes, procedures, and policies to implement vision 8. Small-group work on key issues 9. Positional leaders state what they will support 10. Build new shared vision 11. Identify norms 12. Develop action plans Theoretical base: - Organizational development strategies of Richard Beckhard (1969): Dissatisfaction x Vision x 1st step > Resistance. - Lippitt's belief that people should be engaged in planning their own future (1983).

Approach	Assumptions	Strengths	Weaknesses	Key features
Search Conference Key resources: *The Search Conference: A Powerful Method for Planning Organizational Change and Community Action,* Merrelyn Emery and Ronald Purser	Planning should be done at the grass-roots level. People are purposeful, want to learn, and want to take responsibility for their future. People accept responsibility for things that are important to them. Participation engages people in learning and creativity. Participants can rise above self-interest and make decisions for the common good. People must move from a mindset of a stable environment to one that recognizes their turbulent environment. Diverse groups of people can find enough commonality to work toward a shared purpose. People should have open communication and trust. This approach is based on oral communication. A key ground rule: All perceptions are valid.	Inspires people to find common ground, future focus, and joint action. Fosters good citizenship behaviors. Creates learning–planning communities. Approach has been used in many countries/cultures (India, England, Honduras, Mexico, and Norway). The processes delegate power to those who have responsibility. Takes into consideration the wider social context. Gives a full day to the development of action plans. Reasonable theoretical base: sociotechnical systems theory and action research theory. Can be used in nonprofit, business, and public organizations. There are well-documented descriptions and analyses of the method.	Individualism and bureaucratic organizations are restraining forces. Most work is done in large groups. Involves a limited number of external stakeholders (only those responsible for implementation). The role of the manager is not well defined. Requires a skilled facilitator. Although there are many testimonials, there is little analytic research. Takes a considerable amount of participants' time.	Number of people involved: 15–60 Duration: Two to three days Staff needed: Skilled facilitator or facilitator team Conference manager Minimum requirement for external consultant if internal expertise is not available: four to five consultant days. Sequence of activities: 1. Scan the environment. 2. Appreciate the environment. 3. Deal with constraints and develop strategies and action plans. 4. Implement the action plans. Theoretical base: - Methodology evolved from the work of Fred Emery and Eric Trist and sociotechnical systems. - Work by National Training Labs in the 1960s.

Approach	Assumptions	Strengths	Weaknesses	Key features
Future Search Conferences Key resources: *Discovering Common Ground: How Future Search Conferences Bring People Together to Achieve Breakthrough Innovation,* Marvin Weisbord *Future Search,* Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff	People should think globally and act locally. Focus is on the entire system, not just the problem. Change involves the whole person: body, mind, and spirit. It is important to explore and validate differences. People will support what they create. Everyone (as opposed to experts) solves problems. Getting everybody to improve the whole system yields long-term dignity, meaning, and community. The best action plans come from people finding common ground in dialogue. People can change the present and the future. Common ground cannot be separated from the problems people are trying to solve.	Brings people with divergent views together, including outside stakeholders. Has been used in profit, nonprofit, and public sectors. Has been used in several cultures (America, Asia, Europe, Australia), and many cultures have made successful adjustments. Addresses complex system issues. Process takes breaks (soak time) to allow people to reflect. Focuses on creating the future; collaboration creates energy and action to improve the future. Process looks at both content and process. Creates the big picture and identifies common ground. Proactive approach. Diversity is appreciated and valued—conferences reflect the values and knowledge of participants. Explores and examines new ideas and different views. There are well-documented descriptions and analyses of the method.	Data comes only from the group participating in the conference. Follow-up depends on the culture of the organization. Most work is done in large groups. Involves limited number of external stakeholders. Requires a skilled facilitator. Although there are many testimonials, there is little analytic research. Takes up a considerable amount of participants' time.	Number of people involved: 30–85 (Can run several conferences at once to involve more people) Duration: Three days Staff needed: Skilled facilitator Planning group to: -decide on conference purpose -decide what stakeholders will be invited -decide how conference results will be carried forward after conference Minimum requirement for external consultant if internal expertise is not available: four to five consultant days. Sequence of activities: 1. Review the past 2. Review the present (map current reality and do an external and internal analysis) 3. Create future ideal scenarios and develop action plans Theoretical base: - Methodology evolved from the work of Fred Emory and Eric Trist and sociotechnical systems - Action research theory

Approach

Concept Mapping for Strategic Options Development and Analysis (SODA)

Key resources:

Making Strategy,
Colin Eden and
Fran Ackermann

Assumptions

Problems can be messy.

Subjective views of the "real" problem must be brought to the surface.

A contingent and cyclic (vs. linear) approach to working on problems is important and desired.

Flexibility is desired and important.

The wisdom and experience of individuals is valued.

The individual is a problem finder, a problem solver, and works to make sense of things.

Collective wisdom and multiple perspectives add value.

Strengths

Provides excellent articulation of exactly what the problem is and what can be done about it.

Deals with both content and process.

Provides a process to develop consensus (vs. compromise) and commitment (vs. agreement only) to act across mission, goals, strategies, and actions.

Helps to build shared meaning.

Can be used to manage messy situations and get action and learning.

Fits in with broader change—change process called "journey making."

Based on personal construct theory and social interactionist sociology and operations research.

Allows individual to express opinions without consequence.

Weaknesses

Consultant relates personally with up to 24 people as participants, work is typically with groups and not organizations, but has been used for organizations.

Maximum number of participants for group mapping is about 24, although multiple groups can be used and the resulting concept maps merged.

Relies on a skilled facilitator until the group learns how to do mapping; even then, a facilitator can help.

Takes up a considerable amount of participants' time.

Key features

Number of people involved: up to six to eight; More groups can be used to construct maps that will be merged at a later time; 24 is the maximum.

Duration: Two hours to two days

Staff needed: Experienced facilitator
Decision Explorer or
Group Decision Explorer
software is optional.

Minimum requirement for external consultant if internal expertise is not available: Three to four days.

Sequence of activities:

1. Facilitator provides an overview of key goals and issues.
2. Participants see their own concepts in relation to concepts of others.
3. Focus on individual issues.
4. Opportunities for action and areas for further analysis are identified.
5. Examine the relationships between issues and the broader context.
6. Gain commitment to mission, goals, strategies, and actions.
7. Develop a system for reviewing progress and staying on track.

Theoretical base:

- Four theoretical perspectives about the individual, the nature of organizations, consulting practice, and the role of technology and technique lead to the core notion of SODA as a facilitative device to deal with both content and process.
- This approach is grounded in subjectivism, that holds that each person has his or her own subjective view of the real problem (see Kelly 1955).
- E. C. Tolman first used the cognitive mapping methodology in the late 1940s.

Approach	Assumptions	Strengths	Weaknesses	Key features
Strategic Choice *Planning Under Pressure,* John Friend and Allen Hickling	Need to tap intuition. Tackling real problems is messy. There are many ways/levels/spheres to approach a problem (can use many in this approach). It is important to have a range of approaches for different aspects of the problem. Need to have a willingness to address interconnected decision problems in a strategic way.	Provides excellent articulation of exactly what the problem is and what can be done about it. Attention to differing kinds of uncertainty. Cyclic model (nonlinear development of understanding). Dynamic learning process. Multiple levels of understanding. Tool to manage uncertainty. Develops "both/and" thinking. Interactive working style. Creative learning process. Integrates experience. Works under conditions of uncertainty and conflict.	Choice ultimately means taking a risk, not merely adding up the analytical components in this model. Experiences can be flawed—not generalizable. Designed to make incremental progress versus finding the answer. Requires a *very* skilled facilitator. Requires good drawing and graphic skills to use many of the tools. Maximum number of participants for mapping group is about eight, although multiple groups can be used and the resulting concept maps merged. Takes a considerable amount of participant's time.	Number of people involved: up to six to eight; More groups can be used to construct maps that will be merged at a later time; 24 is the maximum. Duration: Two days Staff needed: Very skilled facilitator (including Graphic representation skills); Stradplan software is optional. Minimum requirement for external consultant if internal expertise is not available: Three to four days. Sequence of activities: 1. Shaping mode (looks at concerns about the structure of a set of decision problems). 2. Designing mode (focuses on concerns about courses of action). 3. Comparing mode (attends to the consequences or other implications of different courses of action). 4. Choosing mode (addresses concerns with commitment to actions over time). An approach for understanding what is going on, cope with complexity, and manage uncertainty in environment, values, decision fields. Theoretical base: - This approach evolved from research observing strategic decision-makers in action address day-to-day dilemmas conducted by operational research workers and social scientists from the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations during the late 1960s and 1970s. The evaluations of the approach have since primarily involved learning from practice.

Approach	Assumptions	Strengths	Weaknesses	Key features
Group Facilitation Methods of the Institute of Cultural Affairs (Technology of Participation) Key resources: *Winning Through Participation,* Laura Spencer	Participatory management is the style of the future. Participation is a structured process and involves learnable skills. Participation requires openness. Participation creates alignment. Participatory management is an art—goes beyond theory. Situations can only be understood and interpreted in light of a vision. The strength of this method is the people and organization themselves, their creativity, innovativeness, and openness.	Creates a climate for cooperation. Develops a methodology for managing the process of participation. Applicable to all types and sizes of organizations. Conversation is holistic. Facts, feelings, and values are considered in making decisions. Analysis encourages learning. Empowers people to take responsibility. Used extensively on several contents in public, nonprofit, business, and community settings. Inspires people to find common ground and agree on joint action. Uses simple technologies for eliciting and grouping ideas. Published documents offer descriptions and uses of this method.	No clear framework is developed to align the methods and techniques; the method is really a combination of methods and workshops. Participants organize their own data, but few skills are taught to do this work. A skilled facilitator is required. Significant logistical requirements. Takes considerable participant time. Method does not necessarily involve content experts when they might be needed.	Number of people involved: 10–200 Duration: Two to seven days Staff needed: Facilitator Steering committee Minimum requirement for external consultant if internal expertise is not available: Three consultant days. Sequence of activities: 1. Map a common vision (includes scanning past and future trends). 2. Scan environment. 3. Look for contradictions to their work. 4. Set strategic direction. 5. Develop action plans with a timeline. Theoretical base: - Process developed in community organizing and development.

Approach	Assumptions	Strengths	Weaknesses	Key features
Open Space Technology Key resources: *Riding the Tiger,* *Open Space Technology: A User's Guide,* *Expanding Our Now: The Story of Open Space Technology,* Harrison Owen	The event must focus on an issue of concern. Natural systems are open. Participants can identify and facilitate discussions of their own issues. Everyone has the right and responsibility to put things on the agenda. Individuals must take responsibility and initiative. Performance is enhanced when the body, mind, and intellect all come together. The quality of interaction is most important. People must volunteer. There should be no forced participation. When the purpose is clear, the structure comes as a natural expression. Everyone has creative potential. People will self-organize based on interest; groups generate their own leadership. Not a process to be used when present and future agendas are clear.	Agenda flexibility. Power and control to the participants. They choose where they want to engage, learn, or contribute. Recognizes or embraces chaos and the whole. Can help create whole-system change and enhance human performance. A process for creating dialogue and organizational learning. Puts responsibility and ownership for ideas on the participants. Can be used in public, nonprofit, business, and community settings. Published descriptions and analysis of the method.	Lack of control by positional leaders of the group or organization. No advance agenda or outcome, since it is determined by the participants. People must take responsibility for their own participation and follow-up action. People must be open; no advance expectations about outcomes. The process is holistic, not orderly or linear. People cannot be forced to join or be given a specific agenda. Analysts, masters, and experts are required among participants—no expert help from the outside. Expert facilitation is required. Significant logistical requirements for this process. Takes up a considerable amount of participants' time.	Number of people involved: 5–500 Duration: One to three days Staff needed: Facilitator Minimum requirement for external consultant if internal expertise is not available: One to one and a half consultant days. Sequence of activities: 1. Opening and description of the process 2. Agenda setting (determine what you want to accomplish, best stated in a question, something real that is of concern—that people have passion about) 3. Open space 4. Morning announcements 5. Evening news 6. Celebration 7. Closing 8. Formal Reports Theoretical base: - Comes from Owens's observations and experience in Liberia with the Kpelle people in Balamah, and Native American tradition.