CHAPTER ONE

THAT WAS THEN, BUT THIS IS NOW

The Past, Present, and Future of Large Group Methods

We opened the local paper to read in the headlines that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) had announced a decision to limit the number of planes using the Ft. Lauderdale Airport because of the high airport congestion and resulting delays in landings and takeoffs. This decision also involved using two secondary runways that, up to that time, had been mostly quiet. The mayor of the county was quoted as saying that the move came as a complete surprise and that the noise implications for several neighborhoods had not been considered. Activists and neighborhood spokespersons also commented negatively. In short, the FAA treated the airport and airline companies as though *they were the system,* without taking into consideration all the people whom the decision affected: neighbors and property owners, county officials, citizens concerned about ecology, and others who might be affected by the decision and thus were stakeholders.

This handbook is about methods for involving stakeholders in decisions about any system change. Certainly, had the FAA used one of the methods presented in this book and involved key stakeholders in the decision-making process, it might have taken a bit longer to present a new plan for the Ft. Lauderdale Airport. But we believe they would have been far more effective in implementing the changes they wanted to make.

The idea that change must involve the whole system has been growing in currency over the last forty years. The practice of family therapy, for example, developed as therapists got clear that treating only the child was much less effective than dealing with the whole system that participates in the illness. In the same way, organizations have often focused on individuals or groups as "the problem" when, in fact, the problem was system-created.

Not surprisingly, systems theory has been around longer than good practice. Katz and Kahn (1966) published the first edition of their seminal book on organizations as systems—*The Social Psychology of Organizations*—in 1966. To be sure, some change practitioners, particularly those whose practice is based in Gestalt theory or the Tavistock organizations-as-systems (Miller and Rice, 1967) work, have always worked with the whole system. The ability to implement these ideas, however, was limited by the lack of methods to bring all the stakeholders together to do the work of change. Until the 1980s, most problem-oriented consulting focused on individuals, interpersonal issues, group functioning (team effectiveness), and inter-unit productivity. At the same time, change processes led by top management that affected the direction of the whole organization usually occurred as a waterfall process: the plan or strategy began at the top and slowly cascaded down the organization hierarchy. By the time it reached the floor of the organization, a rather watered-down version usually remained, and much time had elapsed.

One of the most interesting breakthroughs in organizational development (OD) history occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. OD practitioners, working with systemic problems in organizations, developed methods for bringing together "the system"—all the concerned parties or "stakeholders"—in one place to make decisions about the issues facing them (Weisbord, 1987). The idea that when we are working with a systemic issue we need to draw the boundaries of the system *to include affected stakeholders* is more recent than notions of simply working with the whole system to bring about effective and sustainable change. We believe that this expansion of our understanding of how to decide what, exactly, constitutes the system developed (in consulting) simultaneously with the development of the Large Group Methods that make doing this kind of work possible.

The history of the development of these methods can be understood in three periods: (1) invention and early development (1980s to 1993), (2) adoption of the new methods (1993 to 1997), and (3) diffusion, experimentation, and the embedding of these methods (1997 to the present).

Invention and Early Development of Large Group Methods

Three precursors made the invention of Large Group Methods possible in the mid-1980s. The precursors were theory and practice developments in understanding organizational change that began in the 1950s. Large Group Methods could not have developed without these three strands, which we discuss in the next sections.

Change in Systems

The first strand was the emphasis on systems in the organizational work of Eric Trist and Fred Emery in the 1950s that developed from their study of new technology that was introduced into the British coal-mining industry. Their theory of sociotechnical systems showed how changes in technology can disrupt system functioning, even when what is being introduced is a more efficient technology. In their study, the new technology disrupted established and valued social relationships at work. The dissatisfaction caused by this disruption resulted in a loss of productivity. They proposed a theory that requires attention to the fit of the technological and the social system for the best productivity (Emery and Trist, 1960). Their work helped practitioners understand that change in one part of the system (technology improvements) can affect the rest of the system (who people work with), and this leads to unanticipated effects. Thus sustainable change requires attention to the whole system and systemic intervention.

The work of Trist and Emery in Britain was followed a decade later in the United States by the work of Katz and Kahn (1978), which we mentioned earlier. Katz and Kahn's work had a big impact on the field of organizational behavior, where their book became a standard text. Because this was a period in history when many consultants were also university professors in organizational and social psychology, the ideas were available in the practice of consulting.

Focus on the Future

The second precursor was a shift from focusing on solving organizational problems that are rooted in the past to focusing on the future and its potential. This occurred in both North America and Great Britain. In the United States, Herb

Shepard—a creative early OD practitioner—began working with individuals in the late 1960s in "life planning," that is, doing experiential exercises in which people created their own desired futures. He found that "futuring" created positive energy for change at the individual level.

About the same time, Ronald Lippitt, at the University of Michigan, noticed in his problem-solving work with organizational clients that dealing with problems drains energy. In contrast, he discovered that when you ask people to invent a future they would prefer and enjoy, energy is created in the people doing the planning. Lippitt began consulting with many cities in Michigan that were being devastated by the closing of automobile plants. He brought city stakeholders together in large group meetings—up to three thousand in one town—to create and plan their new future. The effects of this work of focusing on the future are reported in *Choosing the Future You Prefer* (Lippitt, 1980). It is interesting that this work, which, we see in retrospect, was clearly groundbreaking, was viewed by many practitioners at the time as a kind of curiosity. Those were the days of the growth of team-building and problem-solving methods, and many practitioners had practices in which this was their major business.

In the United Kingdom, emphasis on the future developed when Eric Trist ran a conference with Fred Emery, working with the merger of two aerospace engineering organizations in the early 1960s. They asked the two merging companies to consider what kind of company they wanted to become in the future. This process of searching for a desired future eventually became the Search Conference—a method that Fred and Merrelyn Emery would go on to develop further. Merrelyn Emery devoted more than thirty years of her practice in Australia to working with this method in organizations and communities, as well as at the national level (Emery and Purser, 1996).

Many Small Groups = One Large System

The third precursor was the work done by the National Training Laboratory (NTL) Institute in the 1960s in large summer laboratories at Bethel, Maine. In the community workshop and the college workshop, trainers learned to work with large groups by creating small groups within a larger framework. This created a model for working with larger groups of people, which only fully developed during the 1980s.

These early strands of work came together in the mid-1980s when, almost simultaneously, the importance of working with the whole system became focal for OD practitioners. The first clear statement of this new approach appeared when Marvin Weisbord wrote a history of thinking about organizations: *Productive Workplaces* (1987). As he reflected on what had worked and what had not worked in his own change practice, he realized that when he could "get all the stakeholders in the room," he had been able to effectively create changes that were desired and desirable. Out of the thinking expressed in this book and a dialogue with Eric Trist and Merrelyn Emery about their Search Conference work, he developed a new method that he called Future Search. One way it differed from the Search Conference was that it was intended for a larger group of seventy or more, which meant that many stakeholders could be present.

Also in the mid-1980s, Kathie Dannemiller—a student and colleague of Ron Lippitt—was asked to train Ford middle managers to be more proactive. Understanding that the Ford system did not encourage this kind of behavior and that many hours of training would probably not be successful, she refused the quite extensive contract. The stunned potential clients at Ford asked her what she might do to reach the objective. After thinking about it, she proposed that they give her five hundred managers from three levels of management for a week in an off-site location if they really wanted change. This was the birth of Real Time Strategic Change—a method that involves stakeholders in planning and implementing changes for a better organization future. Real Time Strategic Change is now called Whole-Scale Change (Dannemiller Tyson Associates, 2000). The breakthrough that occurred in this work was the large number of people who could be involved at one time so that a whole plant or organization could work on the same issue together and make decisions that would stick and could be immediately implemented.

About the same time but in a quite different structure, Harrison Owen created a new method of gathering people with passion and energy to discuss a topic in a method he called Open Space (Owen, 1997). Again, hundreds of people could participate in creating the agenda for the one- or two-day meeting and engage the topic as they wished.

These breakthrough methods not only accommodate a large number of participants, but they do not require that professional facilitators be at every discussion table; leadership roles are rotated among table participants. As a result, some participants develop new skills that they take with them to the workplace, as they learn to facilitate or act as scribe or reporter for their table group. Rotating small group leadership roles made the use of these methods much more available to communities and organizations without big budgets. The composition of the table groups is heterogeneous ("max-mix") for much of the work but also occurs in functional groups when appropriate to the task.

Adoption of the New Methods (1993–1997)

As the 1990s progressed, differences among the methods gradually became clearer. Some of the publications and activities that encouraged this development were the following. A special issue of *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science,* edited by Bunker and Alban (1992), gathered articles by originators of several different large group interventions. They shared the idea of working with large groups of stakeholders. In addition to some of the methods already mentioned, Dick Axelrod was using a series of large group conferences to redesign work in a process he calls the Conference Model. Don Klein proposed that his 1970s SimuReal method was a systems model that could accommodate many stakeholders and was included. The Inter-Cultural Association (ICA) was using and further developing methods that they had learned in the early days of OD from OD practitioners. Although associated with individual practitioners, all these methods were being developed and refined in practice as ways of gathering stakeholders together to engage each other about issues of common concern. Interest was so intense that the special issue required five additional printings.

A typical large group meeting is held in a large open room with many five-foot (or slightly larger) round tables set up for working sessions. These are not the usual six-foot banquet tables because they need to be small enough in diameter that people can talk easily across them without shouting. A platform for the two facilitators is located in a place optimal for viewing from all the tables. Flip charts are stacked on the side walls to be available when needed. The logistics staff, usually wearing a distinctive color, circulates in their assigned sectors, bringing printed instructions and materials to the tables, as well as microphones for the periods of reports or discussions.

Beginning in 1993, two developments went hand-in-hand. First, the developers of methods wrote books on how to use their methods and spoke at national conferences; a few offered training workshops in the method. Practitioners were thirsty for this new knowledge. They wanted to understand in as much detail as possible what these methods were and how they worked. At the same time, Bunker and Alban (1997) developed and presented a framework for understanding all twelve of the original methods in training workshops and at conferences. There was so much interest that for four years (1995 to 1998), Tom Chase helped plan and sponsor a Large Group Interventions Conference in Dallas, Texas, that was attended by method originators, practitioners, companies using the methods who offered a case describing their experience, CEOs talking about what it was like to involve the whole company, and organizations that were "shopping," that is, thinking about using these methods. Mobil, for example, brought a multilevel group of fourteen people to a conference before they decided to use Real Time Strategic Change with one of their divisions. Our book and the Dallas conferences increased the diffusion of these methods. As interest grew, developers of all the methods began to both offer public workshops and publish their own books on how to use their method. As a result, more and more people became acquainted with Large Group Methods.

The differences among methods gradually became clear, as methods were adopted and used. For example, some methods are easier to learn and adopt than others. Methods with a structured flow of activities like the Search Conference or Future Search are easy to grasp. This means they are easy to try out on an unsuspecting client. In early periods of innovation, there is always a certain amount of experimentation. Ethical practitioners keep this to a minimum and do not suggest methods when the issues are not appropriate for the method. Gathering stakeholders is expensive in time and resources. It should be reserved for issues that are worthy of this kind of commitment, such as the future plans for the organization or important problems.

Some methods also take a longer time commitment to plan and implement than others. Work Design takes months, with many large and small meetings; Open Space can be set up and run with very short lead time; custom-designed methods like Real Time Strategic Change require planning with an internal design team, so they need longer lead times than structured methods. However, it is typical for all methods to have a planning group representing all aspects of the system to advise and manage the whole process.

The framework described in *Large Group Interventions* (Bunker and Alban, 1997) compares all the Large Group Methods in three categories based on outcome: (1) methods for the future, (2) methods for work design, and (3) flexible methods for whole-system participative work. For readers unfamiliar with these methods, we describe them very briefly here. For a more detailed explanation, the developers of these methods have all published detailed descriptions and, in many cases, how-to books to help people who want to use them (many can be found in "The Reading List"—a feature of Chapter Eight, which provides resources). For a comparison of these methods for those trying to decide which method to use, consult our 1997 book. This *Handbook* focuses on current practice, that is, how these methods are being used now to meet six major challenges of the 21st century. Cases illustrating the use of these methods and combinations of these methods appear in the chapters that follow.

Methods for Creating the Future Together

Five main methods are used when an organization or community wants to create a plan for moving into the future that they prefer (rather than simply responding to whatever happens). The methods are the Search Conference, Future Search, Whole-Scale Change, the ICA Strategic Planning Process, and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (see Figure 1.1). Since AI is a newer method for future planning that has come on the scene as a Large Group Method more recently, we will describe it later in this chapter. It is also fair to say that, occasionally, Open Space and SimuReal may be used for future planning. They will be discussed under "Methods for Discussion and Decision Making," which represents more of their use.

The Search Conference

The Search Conference, developed by Fred and Merrelyn Emery (Emery and Purser, 1996), is a two-and-one-half-day conference for thirty-five to forty participants who are members of a system. Diverse groups work together in discussions that scan the current environment and understand it, examine their history as a system, assess the present situation, and agree on a future. One-third of the time of the conference is devoted to planning for actions that will allow them to realize the future they have agreed that they want. In this model, conflict is acknowledged but not dealt with at length. The emphasis is on finding what is held in common and can be agreed to by all as the basis for proceeding.

FIGURE 1.1. LARGE GROUP METHODS FOR CREATING THE FUTURE

THE SEARCH CONFERENCE
Purpose: To create a future vision
Merrelyn and Fred Emery

- Set format: Environmental scan, history, present, future
- Criteria for participants: Within system boundary
- Theory: Participative democracy
- Search for common ground
- Rationalize conflict
- No experts
- Total community discussion
- 2.5-day minimum
- 35 to 40+ participants
- Larger groups = Multisearch Conference
- 1/3 total time is action planning

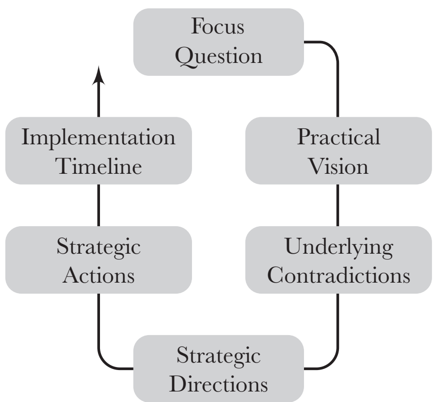
FUTURE SEARCH
Purpose: To create a future vision
Weisbord and Janoff

- Set format: Past, present, future, action planning
- Stakeholder participation (no experts)
- Minimize differences
- Search for common ground
- Self-managed small groups
- 18 hours over 3 days
- 40 to 80+ participants
- Larger groups = Multisearch Conference

WHOLE-SCALE CHANGE
Purpose: To create a preferred future with systemwide action planning
Dannemiller and Jacobs

- Format custom-designed to issue
- Highly structured and organized
- Theory: Beckhard Change Model
- Common database
- 2 to 3 days + follow-up events
- Use of outside experts as appropriate
- Use of small groups and total community
- Self-managed small groups
- 100 to 2,400 participants
- Logistics competence critical
- Daily participant feedback
- Planning committee and consultants design events

ICA STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS
Purpose: Strategic planning



- Stakeholder participation
- 2 to 7 days
- 50 to 200 participants
- Planning committee and consultants design events

Source: Bunker and Alban, 1997.

Future Search

Future Search was developed originally by Marvin Weisbord and then refined over a number of years in collaboration with Sandra Janoff (Weisbord and Janoff, 2000). Future Search got its inspiration from the Search Conference but proceeds somewhat differently. In the first place, the activities of the table groups and general sessions begin by examining the past at three levels—personal, system, and world. Then participants create a "mind map," which is a graphic representation of the trends in the environment that are impacting organizational decisions. Stakeholder groups select a trend from this scan that they believe affects them in important ways, and they discuss what they are doing and not doing about it. Next, stakeholder groups analyze the present by talking about what they are both proud and sorry about in their current organization or community. Finally, "max-mix" groups create skits about the future they want and dramatize it for the whole group. Then, themes crossing all the skits are agreed on as the common ground on which the group can move forward into planning for actions to realize these future themes. Compared with the Search Conference, Future Search engages people more emotionally, as the activities are both rational and affecting; from thirty-five to one hundred or more people can be accommodated at a Future Search.

Whole-Scale Change

Whole-Scale Change (originally called Real Time Strategic Change), developed by Kathie Dannemiller and later with her collaborator Robert Jacobs (Jacobs, 1994), is a flexible method that can include hundreds and even thousands at an event. Unlike Future Search and the Search Conference, Whole-Scale Change custom designs the process of each event to the particular client situation. Even so, there are predicable activities that occur regularly in these events because all are based in a systems understanding of what is needed to do future planning. There must be some kind of assessment of the external environment and understanding of the past and present, as well as focus on a direction desired for the future. Whole-Scale events can include customers and suppliers, as well as expert inputs as needed. Virtually all Large Group Methods work with some kind of planning and design team ahead of the event. In this method, that group collects daily reactions during the two or three days and adjusts the design as needed.

ICA Strategic Planning Process

The ICA Strategic Planning Process (Spencer, 1989) developed originally from the work of the Ecumenical Institute of Chicago, which was greatly influenced by the NTL training and education. They have developed their own method that a network of practitioners in the United States and Canada use in community development, as well as in organizations. Planning events may go on for as long as five days in order to develop specific and implementable plans. At the beginning, the emphasis is on data collection around the issue or focal question. Then a practical vision is created that all agree on. The next step is unique to ICA, and we think it is very useful. Participants discuss the "underlying contradictions," which are those things that get in the way of moving toward the vision of the future they created. The question is: What could prevent us from realizing this vision? This surfaces the psychological resistances, as well as the real barriers. This question is pursued in depth in a search for root causes that can lead to good ideas about what to do. So the next step of action planning follows naturally: select strategic actions that will help overcome the contradictions and then make implementation plans for the whole change effort, planning how, when, who, and what will be done to move forward. ICA works with systems and their stakeholders of any size up to about two hundred.

Methods for Work Design

Work design methods originated in the sociotechnical systems thinking of Trist (1981). In our 1997 framework, there were four large group work design methods. Three methods that developed separately—the Conference Model, Whole-Scale Work Design, and Fast Cycle Full Participation—have blended with each other so as to be indistinguishable, though still are practiced by those titles. The other work design method—Participative Design—is quite different, in that it starts at the bottom of the organization and moves upward (see Figure 1.2).

The Conference Model (Axelrod and Axelrod, 2000), Whole-Scale Work Design, and Fast Cycle Full Participation Work Design are three models of work design that appeared in our original formulation, with enough difference in approach to warrant separate discussions. Since that time, the demand for

FIGURE 1.2. LARGE GROUP METHODS FOR WORK DESIGN

LARGE GROUP WORK DESIGN **The Conference Model, Whole-Scale Work Design, Fast Cycle Full Participation Work Design**	**PARTICIPATIVE DESIGN** ***Fred and Merrelyn Emery***
• Integrated series of large group meetings. • 1 to 2-day sessions • Topics: Create the vision. Conduct environmental analysis. Conduct work systems analysis. Conduct social system analysis. Develop a blueprint for the new organization/process. Plan for implementation. • Whole system communication strategy is followed between meetings. • Small task force work adds detail to large group meeting results.	• The process is bottom-up. • Organizationwide education is first step. • Management sets minimum critical specifications. • Each level coordinates and controls its own work. • Each unit designs its own work. • Six design principles are used to redesign work. • Multiskilling is the norm.

redesigning work has diminished, due mostly to the decrease in manufacturing in the West and off-shoring. Now client needs and requirements, more than a particular model, seem to determine the flow of the work design process. For these reasons, we have combined the three methods into one generic description. It may be, however, that with some clients a true version of the Conference Model or Whole-Scale Work Design is adopted. As far as we know, Fast Cycle Full Participation is not often practiced.

Work redesign that involves the whole system is a change that takes a number of months. It is authorized by the organization's leadership, who set the goals and clarify the boundaries and constraints. Usually, a planning or design team is then appointed to be in charge of the overall process, which occurs in a series of spaced events, often about a month apart. In these large group events, stakeholders create a preferred future, interact with relevant customers and suppliers to understand their expectations, and perform a technical analysis of the work system identifying problems that are leading to lowered efficiency or quality. Then suggestions for how to design the system so that it meets its goals and operates excellently are solicited and considered; the most promising are selected and implemented. At the same time, key support processes may need to be aligned with the new design.

Throughout this process, there is constant two-way communication with the whole system. Those who do not attend events have an opportunity to give inputs to issues being debated. The idea is to involve and keep involved as many people as possible so that when the new system "goes live" there are few surprises. As many as six thousand employees have been involved in this type of work design.

Participative Design was created by Fred and Merrelyn Emery (1993); contemporary modifications have been made by Bob Rehm (1999). Participative Design is an organizationwide process whose assumption is that the people who do the work know the most about it and are therefore the best people to decide how to get it done effectively and efficiently. This is a bottom-up approach to work design, as contrasted with a top-down approach. The work design starts literally at the bottom, or lowest level of the organizational chart. The people at this level gather for education about the six design principles they will use to redesign their work and their jobs within the "critical specifications" set by the organization's leadership. The basic principle that is operative in the redesign is that each level coordinates and controls its own work.

When the first level has completed their redesign, the next level meets to ask: "What is our work?" This is where the process gets very interesting because usually the people included at that next level up have been supervisors. But if the lowest-level people are now coordinating and controlling their own work, the question the former supervisors must address is, What is their work now? According to this method, the process proceeds up to the top of the organization. We know of only a few organizations that have completed the whole process from bottom to top, but the method can be used in well-defined sections of an organization.

Methods for Whole-Scale Participative Work

In addition to the four methods we included in our previous book (SimuReal, Open Space Technology, Work Out, and Whole-Scale), two new methods have been developed in the intervening time. We give a brief summary of the four here (see Figure 1.3). Later in this chapter we will describe the two new methods: The World Café and America*Speaks*.

FIGURE 1.3. LARGE GROUP METHODS FOR WHOLE-SYSTEM PARTICIPATIVE WORK

SIMUREAL
Purpose: Do real-time work on current issues, test future designs, learn about system
Donald and Alan Klein

- Organization selects issue for work.
- Room arrangement reflects organization's structure.
- People act their organizational roles.
- There are periods of stop action and reflection.
- Decision process is agreed to in advance.
- 1 day
- 50 to 150 people
- Facilitator needs expertise in process consultation.

WHOLE-SCALE INTERACTIVE EVENTS
Purpose: Problem solving
Dannemiller and Jacobs

Uses same methodology as Whole-Scale in Figure 1.1.

- Flexible method with many different uses.

WORK OUT (General Electric)
Purpose: Problem identification and process improvement

- Improvement target selected.
- Employee cross-functional meeting held.
- 1 to 2 days
- Process: Discuss and recommend
- Senior management responds immediately.
- Champions and sponsors follow through to implementation.
- 30, 60, 90 day follow-up

OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY
Purpose: Discussion and exploration of system issues
Harrison Owen

- Is least structured of Large Group Methods.
- Uses divergent process.
- Large group creates agenda topics.
- Interest groups form around topics.
- Newsroom printouts allow for sharing information across interest groups.
- One facilitator lays out format and ground rules, "holds the space."
- Facilitator needs an undestanding of large group dynamics.
- 1 to 3 days

Source: Bunker and Alban, 1997.

SimuReal

SimuReal was created by Donald Klein in the 1970s and has subsequently been developed by Alan Klein (Klein, 1992; Klein and Klein, 2005[1]). A physical simulation of an organization or system and its players is set up in a large space. Stakeholders to the theme or focal issue are invited to participate in a one-day (or shorter) learning and action-taking event. People act in their normal roles during action periods on the selected issue or problem. During stop-action periods, a trained facilitator guides the whole system in a discussion of what happened and what everyone observed. Then they go back and work some more, followed by another stop-action discussion. After three iterations of this cycle, the whole group decides on appropriate actions to take as a result of their learning. Although invented as a problem-clarification and remediation method, SimuReal has been used to test potential organization designs and changes.

Open Space Technology

Open Space Technology (OST) or Open Space was created by Harrison Owen (1997) and is the method with what might be called a minimalist structure, as compared with others. It is a divergent process in which anything from small to very large groups of participants are invited to gather and create the agenda for discussion of whatever seems important to them around a focused topic or theme. Only one facilitator is needed to lead the process, and as long as the facilities allow, any number of people can participate.

At the beginning of the meeting, which can be from one day or less to three days or more, everyone is seated in a large circle of chairs. In the first hour the facilitator describes the reason for meeting and the norms and rules of Open Space. Then the facilitator invites people to come to the center of the circle, write the topic they want to discuss on half a newsprint sheet, sign their name, and announce their topic to the group. Then they go to a big open wall where they select a time and place, written ahead of time on sticky notes, and post their topic with time and place of discussion on the wall. This becomes the agenda for the meeting and the place where people can find out what is going on. The agenda can be added to at will, as long as the person who posts the topic agrees to show up at the appointed time and begin the discussion. Each day is divided into discussion periods of an hour, or a bit more.

The whole group gathers again in the big circle at the end of each day for "The Evening News." If there is more than one day, they begin each day's work with "The Morning News." These are brief and quite informal gatherings about whatever the participants want to say. Everyone can find out what is being said in discussion groups they do not attend by going to a different wall on which summary reports from the discussion groups are posted as they are typed out on computers in "the newsroom" by the proposers of the topic.

Most Open Space meetings also add some convergent activity such as dot voting (placing small, colored sticky dots on wall charts to show preferences), prioritizing, or some form of action planning onto this basic format in order to take what has happened in the discussions and move forward. Open Space can be used for endless types of discussions, from sensing whether an issue is really important, to getting input about important decisions that are about to be made, to creatively thinking, as a group, about new products or future services a company might offer.

Work Out

Work Out is a participative problem-solving method that was created at General Electric under the impetus of Jack Welch's leadership (Slater, 1999). A high-level sponsor authorizes the gathering of all the relevant stakeholders to a particular problem in one place for several days to address and take action on the problem. In the final afternoon, the sponsor and other managers or executives with the authority to make decisions attend and publicly authorize or veto proposals from working groups. Then over the next thirty, sixty, and ninety days, short progress reporting meetings are held. It is expected that action will be complete in ninety days and results and cost savings known. The method proved so successful internally that General Electric began offering training to its clients and suppliers. The method has been widely adopted by companies that have often used their own name for it.

Whole-Scale Interactive Events

Whole-Scale Interactive Events (Dannemiller Tyson Associates, 2000) are events that are custom-tailored for a particular engagement. An example is bringing together New York City stakeholder organizations to take action on the alarming increase in tuberculosis among the homeless people living in the city. The design for the meeting in Whole-Scale events in all three categories is created by assessing three elements: (1) level of dissatisfaction, (2) existence of a vision or goal, and (3) clarity of first steps that one can take to begin moving toward the goal. The theory is that all three factors must be correctly in place for any change to occur.

Continuing Development of Large Group Methods

During the 1990s, practitioners were learning these methods and building an experience base. Some chose to define themselves as specializing in one of these methods. Others added competence in some of the methods as they needed it in a more general practice of organizational change. Because work redesign, which developed from sociotechnical design theory, usually occurs over months and even years, there is a group of practitioners who mainly do this work. Future-planning consultants, however, often know several of the future methods. There are networks of practitioners of some methods such as Future Search and Open Space who meet online and in person to learn from each other and offer expertise to communities and nonprofits with limited budgets.

Core Characteristics of Methods

Every method has a set of underlying principles that are considered to be central. As we look across all the methods, we propose four core characteristics that we believe are accurate and essential characteristics that span all the Large Group Methods.

1. *Inclusion of stakeholders:* The first core characteristic is that the people invited to participate include those who have a stake in the issues being discussed, regardless of level or function or whether they are inside or outside the organization. For example, a business may invite customers, suppliers, even competitors as it plans for the future. In the community, this means whoever is affected, regardless of position, class, or power. A public school issue could involve everyone in the school system, including students and janitors, as well as parents, citizens, politicians, and whoever is relevant to the issue at hand.

Essentially, these are democratic methods that encourage all voices to be heard. They encourage input to decisions employees or citizens are asked to support. It is important to point out that this does not necessarily mean that five hundred stakeholders get together and make the decision. They may be the decision makers, or their input may be incorporated by an executive group that is present at the event and responsible for the organization. Both levels of decision making work well if people know in advance what the ground rules are.

Practitioners who propose these methods need to understand that not all leaders and managers want to involve stakeholders in having their say or in mutual decision making. This means that sensitive negotiation and coaching are part of contracting with executives about the use of these methods. There have been instances where practitioners, in their eagerness to help the client move into action, did not insist that the client really understand what these methods do in terms of stakeholder voice, involvement, commitment, and new ideas, and what they require in terms of leadership participation, support, and follow-up. Taking enough time to fully educate the leadership during the contracting phase of the intervention is key to realizing the true potential of these methods.

2. *Engagement of multiple perspectives through interactive activities:* Participants engage in a series of activities that explore the organization or community context and help them think more broadly than their own perspective. This strategy accomplishes several things. First, it prevents people from leaping into problem solving and taking action before the context is fully explored. Second, it exposes them interactively in small groups to a diverse group of stakeholders with very different perspectives in a process that allows everyone to participate and to be heard. This increases the amount of information available and expands participants' understanding of issues, leading to the possibility of out-of-the-box thinking.

3. *Opportunity to influence:* These structures allow people to have *voice*—to be heard—and to influence the outcomes under discussion at the meeting.

4. *Search for common ground:* A goal and the process structure of many of these methods focus attention on finding the areas of agreement—the *common ground*—that participants share. In large groups with many different stakeholders, there are bound to be differences, many of them. That is not of great concern because there is no objective to resolve all the differences.

None of these methods use conflict resolution strategies to deal with differences (Bunker, 2000). The objective in most of the methods is *to find common ground*, that is, to understand what those present and representing the system *agree on*. The assumption is that once what is agreed on is clear, it is possible to move forward from that common ground, even though differences remain.

Current Trends and New Methods

Since the publication of our book *Large Group Interventions* in 1997, a great deal has happened in the field, as more and more organizations and communities have used these methods for their own purposes. We have been particularly interested in many accounts of the spread and use of these methods worldwide; we have presented workshops on the methods described in our book in many countries. In March 2005, Robert Marshak, the acting editor of *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science,* invited us to edit a second special issue on Large Group Methods (Bunker and Alban, 2005). This gave us the opportunity, twelve years after the publication of the first special issue, to again send out a "Call for Papers" and ask for articles that would show what has happened in the use and spread of these methods. The *Journal* invitation was an excellent way to answer our questions and find out how and where these methods are being used.

We were amazed when we received more than fifty manuscripts and descriptions of possible submissions for the *Journal*. These submissions were from six continents; we only had room for ten manuscripts! This was a further confirmation that these methods were being used globally for a variety of needs.

Diffusion: Spreading the Word

Malcolm Gladwell (2000), in his book *The Tipping Point,* describes the tipping point as the moment when ideas and products are diffused and accepted by a critical mass. After our book was published, we started offering workshops to familiarize people with the methods described in the first part of this chapter. Training workshops were a major vehicle through which the core concepts and skills were made available to consultants, leaders, and academics around the globe.

Many of the developers have published books and articles (some translated into other languages) on their particular approaches. The use of Internet technology, including listservs and Web sites and the newsletters of the developers, have also increased knowledge and connected people interested in these methods. Presentations at major conferences of organizations like the Organization Development Network and the Academy of Management, as well as at many international meetings and at organizational change training-and-degree programs like the Columbia University Program for Organization Development and Human Resource Management and the Pepperdine University and American University–NTL degree programs, have all helped with the dissemination of these concepts. Multinational corporations began to use these methods internationally to address complex organizational issues. Today there are skilled international external and internal consultants who use these methods in their work. Companies like General Electric have been strong on internal capacity building and have chosen not to rely on external consultants. They have trained their people worldwide in the use of Work Out. One of the authors remembers sitting in a restaurant in Danbury, Connecticut, hearing a young woman at the next table say, "I am leaving tomorrow for India to train our people there to run Work Outs."

The March 2005 special issue of the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* documents the international diffusion of Large Group Methods with articles on a joint venture between a U.S. multinational and an Indian family business, an example from IKEA in Sweden on improving their distribution system. In the same issue, Suzanne Weber writes about the diffusion of Open Space, Future Search, and mixed designs in German-speaking counties. She documents over nine hundred conferences using Large Group Methods run in Germany over the period of three years. In this book, Chapter Five focuses on the cross-cultural use of these methods, with three case examples of work going on across the globe. In other chapters, cases from Great Britain and Canada can be found.

Diffusion: Stakeholder Engagement

Another significant factor in the diffusion of Large Group Methods has been global economic and social pressure, particularly in the public, government, and nonprofit sectors. There has been growing recognition of the value and necessity of stakeholder inclusion and a growing demand from stakeholders to have a voice in important decisions that affect them. Large Group Methods have been used to address many community and public sector dilemmas where agreement among diverse stakeholders is essential for movement on important issues.

There is a growing polarization today regarding environmental issues: economic development versus ecological sustainability, water for agriculture versus water for drinking, states' rights of eminent domain versus the rights of the homeowners. There are many instances where Large Group Methods have been used effectively to bring stakeholders together to work on these polarizing issues. In developing countries, the United Nations, NGOs, and local governments have found it essential to learn how to work together, set priorities, define responsibilities, and develop action plans. This is not easy, as these agencies have different cultures, different structures, and their own priorities. We have seen a variety of Large Group Methods used to address these issues. Necessity may have been the mother of use and adoption. Environmental pressures and demands have helped with the global dispersion of Large Group Methods.

Adaptations and Innovations

There are many examples, some in this book, where a Future Search, Open Space, or other method has been used in its original form with excellent results. There are other situations in both the private and public sectors where a specific client need or constraint has resulted in combining or introducing new methods to address specific requirements. This book provides examples of some of the variations. For example, the BBC took one of the new methods (AI) and stretched the process over months. The Boston University Dental School combined a Future Search format with the introduction of scenario planning; the World Vision case used a Future Search format but added interactive technologies in order to involve 4,500 people in 100 offices worldwide.

We have also seen some of the core principles and activities of Large Group Methods used to enhance ordinary meetings. A few years ago we were at a hotel near the Denver Airport. As we passed the ballroom, we noticed a large group of people sitting at tables, six or seven to a table, busily working. We were told it was a cross-section of employees from the recently opened airport trying to find solutions to some of the baggage-handling problems. We hung around for a while, and finally at a break asked the meeting facilitators for a more detailed account of what they were doing and what method they were using. "Oh," they said, "there is something we call the Blue Book; we have combined something called Work Out with something called Future Search and a few ideas of our own to work on issues connected with the opening of the new airport." They had all of the key elements: the system in the room, an interactive process that gave people an opportunity to give their perspective, and a process to identify the issues, solve the dilemmas, and take action. (The Blue Book was *our* book, although it was never our intention that it would be used as a how-to book!)

Several weeks later we were at a large corporate headquarters and passed a conference room. We noticed twenty or so round tables; six to eight people sat around each one. We were told it was a corporate briefing. The format was presentations, discussions at the tables, and opportunities to raise questions and concerns and get responses from the leadership. We asked why they were not using an auditorium arrangement. We heard, "This works much better. People get a better understanding of the materials presented through discussion at the tables; they ask clarifying questions and give good suggestions about the issues."

"How did you come up with this way of doing things?" we asked.

They replied that one of the executives had seen this done at another company and thought it worked well!

Many churches and synagogues today, when calling a new pastor or rabbi, use some of the exercises from Future Search to clarify the kind of leadership they need for their future. They may use history timelines, a mind map on current issues affecting the faith community, and an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. The data generated help the search committee develop a profile of the skills and experiences they need in the new leadership.

Donald Schön, in his book *Beyond the Stable State* (1971), talks about "ideas in currency." Once ideas get into circulation they spread rapidly, and the origin of these ideas is lost. Several years ago, one of the authors heard an interview with James Baker, who was secretary of state under President G.H.W. Bush in the early 1990s; he was commenting on the Israeli-Palestinian situation. Baker seemed to indicate in the interview that it might have been a mistake not to have included some of the key stakeholders at the first Camp David meeting. The assumption had been made that the two leaders spoke for their people! The idea of key stakeholder participation is an important part of many of these methods. What surprised us, however, was the use of the word *stakeholder.* We wonder if there may be fallout into the general culture of some of the basic ideas from these methods. Here are some examples:

1. The idea that stakeholders need to be involved in decision making is not a new idea, but using the word *stakeholder* connotes involvement. The word is appearing more and more frequently in the media and in business language.
2. Rotating leadership in small groups is more commonly practiced today, reserving professional facilitation for times that are expected to be more confrontational or complicated.
3. Large corporate meetings are often held today in a conference or ballroom, with participants sitting at small round tables instead of in auditorium style. The tables allow for discussion of key issues; participants have the opportunity to ask questions and give feedback to the leadership.
4. The term *finding common ground* appears frequently today, especially in situations of high divergence.

New Large Group Methods

In this section, we describe three new methods that were not included in our first book because they had not been developed. These are (1) Appreciative Inquiry Summit Meeting (see Figure 1.4), (2) The World Café (see Figure 1.5), and (3) America*Speaks* (see Figure 1.6). It is clear that these new methods are built on many of the core principles described earlier.

Appreciative Inquiry Summit Meeting

David Cooperrider, along with some of his colleagues from Case Western Reserve, originally developed AI as a data-gathering method. The data could be collected either in an organization or in a community setting.

A Unique Approach to Data Gathering. What made this approach unique was the focus on what was going on positively in the area being researched. If the issue were gender relationships in the organization, data would be collected on positive experiences that members of the organization had had with the

FIGURE 1.4. LARGE GROUP METHODS FOR CHANGING THE FUTURE: APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY SUMMIT MEETING

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY SUMMIT MEETING
Purpose: To build the future on recognizing and expanding existing strengths
David Cooperrider

- Format similar to Future Search
- Participation not limited by number, includes stakeholders
- May be done over several days
- Four phases:
  - *Discovery:* Interviews and storytelling surface positive strengths.
  - *Dream:* Based on stories and interview data, group builds a desired future.
  - *Design:* Group addresses the system changes needed to support the desired future.
  - *Delivery:* Group plans for implementing and sustaining the change.

opposite sex. People were encouraged to tell stories about these relationships. Follow-up questions would probe the elements and interactions in these relationships that created this positive experience.

These key elements were then extrapolated, and the next issue to be addressed was, "What do we need to do in this organization to create more of these positive experiences?" This process has been used very effectively in the merger of two companies that need to create a new company culture out of two previously independent companies. Rather than one company "acquiring" the other and imposing its culture, AI holds the promise of there being a real merger, of taking the best of both old cultures and blending it into a new culture that everyone can subscribe to. In the same way, in a community setting people are often asked what they particularly appreciated about their community. They are encouraged to tell stories about their positive and affirming community experiences. The philosophical approach starts with what is already working and uses the strengths identified as building blocks for a better future. This method reframes situations in such a way that people recognize what is already present, active, and life enhancing, and then ask, "What do we need to do to create more of these experiences?"

The Meeting. As Large Group Methods developed, Cooperrider and his colleagues had the opportunity to experience several of these methods. As a result, they developed the Appreciative Inquiry Summit Meeting (Ludema, Whitney, Mohr, and Griffin, 2003), which is a four-day large group event that brings together stakeholders in the organization or community to share the data collected, hear the stories, and retain the best of the positive values and practices of the organization or community. The group then focuses on ways to augment the positive aspects of what has been identified.

Each day is a new phase: Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny (the "4-D" process). In the Discovery phase, employees are trained to interview other employees about positive experiences in the organization and what they see as the organization's values and strengths. The task of the interviewer is to tease out the core elements that help create these positive experiences. This phase may occur as part of the AI Summit, or it may happen in advance of the meeting.

The next phase—the Dream phase—now uses Large Group Methods to bring together the system and its stakeholders to plan how to build the positive elements from the interviews into a vision of the desired future state. The best stories from the interviews may be retold at the summit meeting and the core elements presented as "future possibilities." However it is done, the group comes to some common ground about what they want to achieve in their future.

In the Design phase, participants plan actions to create and sustain the future they want. This involves examining leadership, infrastructure, policies, and systems that would support the proposed changes.

Finally, in the Destiny phase, innovation teams that volunteer to achieve specific goals after the summit ends self-organize for action.

The Focus on What Is Right. AI is one of several Large Group Methods that does not spend time trying to problem solve the present but, instead, focuses on creating a better future, once the current reality has been acknowledged. When people focus on what is wrong, they lose sight of the positive things that are happening. Then it is easy to become stuck in trying to fix what is wrong rather than focusing on the "more that could be." This method has become very popular and is often combined with other methods. We think it corrects an imbalance in how Westerners look at their world. We are trained very early in critical thinking. The more education we have, the more critical we may become. As a result, we end up looking for what is wrong, often only acknowledging what is right as an afterthought. The AI Summit Meeting corrects this imbalance by combining elements of Future Search with some form of storytelling and data sharing on positive experiences around the theme.

In this book, there is an innovative use of the AI Summit at the British Broadcasting Company (BBC), where the summit was modified and spread out, with intervals of several months between phases of the summit in order to involve the 27,000 employees at the BBC (see Cheung-Judge and Powley in Chapter Two). In the same chapter in the World Vision case (Kaplan and Fry), an AI Summit is held in Bangkok with 150 representatives of this worldwide relief agency, while 4,500 other employees in 100 offices around the globe participate before, during, and after the summit in an imaginatively structured online community.

The World Café

Another new Large Group Method is The World Café, developed by Juanita Brown. This method is being used separately or in combination with other methods (Brown and Isaacs, 2005). The World Café is a process that fosters authentic conversation and takes about two to three hours. Each World Café activity is focused around a theme that engages the invited group of stakeholders. They sit at small café-style tables, four or five people to a table, covered with "tablecloths" made of drawing paper, and are given pens or markers. Each group is given about twenty to thirty minutes to both talk about the theme and sketch their ideas on the tablecloth. After twenty minutes or so, the table host instructs them to leave one person at the table who will communicate the substance of the conversation that just occurred to the next group. Then everyone else separates and goes to a different table, and the process repeats itself.

There are at least three iterations of this process before the final groups post or report the ideas their table has developed. The entire group then engages in a town meeting discussion of what has occurred. If themes are identified, they can lead to whatever action is appropriate. This process is very useful in settings where there are factions or where people have fixed ideas and need to engage each other and hear different perspectives on the situation. The World Café method mixes people up for a different conversational experience. A focused

FIGURE 1.5. LARGE GROUP METHOD FOR DISCUSSION AND DECISION MAKING: THE WORLD CAFÉ

THE WORLD CAFÉ
Purpose: A conversational process that helps a group explore an important issue
Juanita Brown

- Overarching theme or question to be explored
- May be done in a 1/2 day to 2 or 3 days, depending on issue
- Large space set with café tables that seat 4 people, a café environment
- Tables are covered with butcher paper with markers and crayons available
- No limitation in numbers of people, more is better than too few
- Consists of a number of rounds lasting 20–30 minutes
- After each round three people move to another table, one person remains to host the arrivals from another table
- New groups share previous insights and continue exploration
- Periodic community reporting of ideas and insights
- Listening to diverse viewpoints, and suspending premature judgment is encouraged

theme that fully engages the participants is critical to a productive experience. The World Café can be used in groups as small as twelve and as large as twelve hundred.

One of the interesting aspects of The World Café is the use of café tables, creating a casual environment that is familiar in many countries: the coffee house, pub, or sidewalk café where people gather for conversation. In the March 2005 issue of *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences,* there is a description of The World Café in Singapore, where its similarity to the local coffee houses facilitated in-depth conversations that might not have occurred in a more formal environment. This method has been widely used internationally from Sweden to Singapore. In this book, it is used as a way to bring citizen action groups and refinery management together for discussion about environmental issues (Adams and Clancy in Chapter Four).

America*Speaks*

During the 1990s, Caroline J. Lukensmeyer began work on a method for involving larger groups of citizens in critical policy issues that affect them. These meetings created discussion and deliberation among diverse groups of citizens. Rather than the usual panel presentations and audience questions to a panel, citizens participated in discussions at round tables (ten people per table). Lukensmeyer, after experimenting with different formats, started an organization—America*Speaks*—which is committed to participative democracy and uses this Large Group Method to give citizens voice in a new and effective way. In the late 1990s in major cities across the country, America*Speaks* held conversations on the dilemmas facing the Social Security system. A trained facilitator led each table discussion in order to ensure that people stayed on the task and no one dominated the discussion. Prior to the meeting, participants received a detailed and balanced discussion guide to increase their knowledge of the issue.

FIGURE 1.6. LARGE GROUP METHOD FOR DISCUSSION AND DECISION MAKING: AMERICA*SPEAKS*

AMERICA*SPEAKS*
Purpose: To engage community/citizen groups in a process of learning and discussion around important issues affecting these groups
Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer

- Format designed to engage the issues
- Participative democracy
- Full spectrum of stakeholders a basic requirement
- Laptop computers at each table to record discussion themes
- Key pads for voting for every participant
- Table facilitators structure discussion
- Overhead screens display discussion themes and voting tallies
- Subject matter experts on call to discussion tables
- Several hundred to 5,000 participants
- Usually one day
- Extensive prep and set up work

A unique aspect of this method (because the gatherings often involve hundreds or thousands of people) is the use of technology. Innovative software is used that allows people at the round tables to discuss a topic and input their ideas on a laptop provided to each table. The inputs from each table go to a central group that organizes and posts the themes from all the tables on large screens visible to the whole community. In addition, each participant has a keypad to vote agreement or disagreement with the recommendations presented.

America*Speaks* became highly visible in July of 2002, headlined on the front pages of many newspapers, when nearly five thousand people gathered at the Javits Center in New York City to react to proposals to redevelop Ground Zero. As a result of the input from participants, the architectural plans were changed. An interesting description of their work, along with several examples, appears in the March 2005 issue of *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science.* In this book, Steven Brigham writes about their involvement in long-range planning for the three-state metropolitan area around Cincinnati, Hamilton County (see Chapter Five).

The Future of Large Group Methods

Large Group Methods are now part of the practice of many OD and change consultants. They may use them by their official names or modify and relabel them for their own purposes. Whatever the case, they are in widespread use. What will happen as we move further into the 21st century? Based on the work that is currently going on, we think several areas of development can be predicted. First, we expect the spread of these methods to non-Western cultures to continue. Second, we believe that the usefulness of Large Group Methods in community settings or wherever diverse interest groups must work together predicts their expanded use there. Third, the use of technology, as seen in several cases in this book, will continue to lead to innovative adaptations of these methods using technology.

Part Two of this book is organized around the six areas of great challenge in the 21st century mentioned in the Preface. We think these challenges—more than the authority of methods—are currently driving practice. Organizations these days are stretched. Communities are dealing with issues of great moment with limited resources. The issues are urgent, and stakeholders want to have a voice in the decision making. Large Group Methods make it possible to widen the circle to include more people in the movement toward effective action. To see how all this is happening, read on!

Note

1. For information about their 2005 article, "SimuReal: A Large Group Method for Organizational Change," contact A. A. Klein, & D. C. Klein at Klein Consulting, 11006 Wood Elves Way, Columbia, MD 21044, alan@klein.net.

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THE MATRIX

	Case Examples by Category							
	Sector				*Situation*		*Methods*	
	Business-Industry	**Nonprofit-Educational**	**Health Care**	**Community**	**Cross-Cultural**	**Conflict**	**Type**	**IT Use**
Chapter 2: Geographically Dispersed								
BBC		✓					AI	✓
World Vision		✓		✓	✓		AI	✓
Chapter 3: Organizational Crisis								
American Airlines	✓						Mixed	✓
USC School of Education		✓					FS	
Chemical Plant	✓						FS + Kaisen	
BU Dental School		✓	✓				SP, FS, WD	
Chapter 4: Conflict								
Teachers Union		✓				✓	WS	
Health Service UK		✓	✓	✓		✓	WS	
FAA	✓	✓				✓	FS	
Petrochemical	✓			✓		✓	WC	
Chapter 5: Communities								
SpeakUp!				✓	✓		AI, FS	
Israel		✓		✓	✓	✓	OS	✓
Hamilton County		✓		✓		✓	WS, IT	✓

Chapter 6: Cross-Cultural								
Mexico		✓			✓		FS, OS, PD	✓
Africa		✓		✓	✓		OS	
Indonesia				✓	✓	✓	FS	
Parliament				✓	✓	✓	Mixed	
Chapter 7: New Patterns								
General Electric	✓						WO	
Boeing	✓						Core Principles	
Canadian Health		✓	✓				OS	

KEY: AI—Appreciative Inquiry
FS—Future Search
Mixed—Combined methods
OS—Open Space
PD—Participative Design
SP—Scenario Planning
WC—The World Café
WO—Work Out
WD—Work Design