

Broadening Whole System Participation Through Virtual Collaboration: How World Vision Brought 4,500 People to Bangkok!

Ellen Raboin

In early 2004, World Vision embarked on a process to define “Big Goals” to guide the organization into the future. One of the world’s largest nonprofit organizations, World Vision has 20,000 employees and offices in 100 countries. It is the world’s biggest distributor of food, feeding over four million children every day.

World Vision’s global leadership team cares deeply about their work, their employees, and the children they feed, and supports the autonomy of their regional offices to make the best use their resources. (Who’s to tell an emergency relief group in Sudan, for example, that they have to spend their resources the same way as a group in Chicago?)

For this reason, when it came to the “Big Goals” planning process, they wanted to involve *literally* all of the stakeholders. Understanding the value of getting the “whole system in the room,” they made it a design principle as they planned a four-day goal planning off-site in Bangkok, Thailand, for June 2004.

But how exactly do you engage an entire organization? The reality of limited travel budgets and large numbers of attendees led them to consider creative alternatives. The team designing the off-site recognized that the Internet and technology presented options they had never before considered.

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FUTURE SEARCH NETWORK'S FUTURESEARCHING

EXPLORING COMMON GROUND FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

Compressing the FS Process in an Emergency

Chris Roesel

Malawi, one of the world’s poorest nations. Famine was caused last year by a complex system of factors. The country itself is a long, narrow, densely populated country in south-central Africa of 12.1 million people who suffered famine in 2001 and 2002. There is a fresh-water lake, Lake Malawi, the third largest lake in Africa, that runs nearly two-thirds the length of the country.

Malawi is a former British protectorate, given independence in 1966 and ruled from then until 1994 by Dr. Hastings Banda. Banda introduced many policies, some desirable, others less so, such as the switch from millet to corn as a monoculture staple. Banda was superceded as president (“for life”) in 1994 by Bakili Muluzi, who has ruled since, attempting to gain still further terms. Malawi is poor, with a per-capita income of \$160.

Malawi’s principal exports are agricultural produce, tobacco, tea, sugar, and cotton. Illiteracy is rampant. Its population is growing quickly, although a very high incidence of HIV/AIDS (over 20% of the adult population) and high infant and child mortality are currently decreasing the population growth rate and have decreased life

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expectancy to less than 40 years of age. Malawi suffered a drought in 1991/1992 and floods and drought in 2001 and 2002. The last drought, combined with AIDS, malaria, cholera, and unwise government sales of corn stocks, resulted in famine. Despite an extensive system of health centers established by Dr. Banda, the population is not very healthy.

Malawi has many ethnic groups, languages, and religions. All the ethnic groups present in Malawi have their own languages or dialects. The Chewa, in the Central and Southern regions of the country, is the most populous and dominant group, speaking Chewa or Chichewa, the national language, used throughout the country. English is the official national language, spoken in towns and in most of the countryside. Tumbuka, used by more than 500,000 people, is spoken in the Northern Region; Yao, used by about 600,000 people, in the Southern Region. There are also the Ngoni, Chipoka, Lambya, Ngonde, and Tonga. A minority of Indians and Europeans, living mainly in towns, is involved in business, commercial farming, and tourism.

Most Malawians are Christians, belonging mainly to Protestant churches. There are also some Catholics. Many Malawians continue to be influenced by ancestral beliefs, animism, which they mix with Christianity. Ancestors play a major role in beliefs that impact people's lives. The use of magic is widespread. Malawi also has an important community of Muslims, especially in the Northern Region, around Lake Malawi. These ethnic groups,

languages, and religions add to the complexity of the country.

The causes of the current famine are complex. The country is extensively deforested. As a consequence, drought and famine have affected the

In a two-day future search conference as part of a two-week planning and famine response proposal-writing consultancy, I gained insights into the Malawian situation that would not have been possible in two weeks of reading and talking individually with dozens of interviewees.

country multiple times since independence, most recently in 1992, 2001, and 2002. Various sources have attributed the current famine to AIDS and the loss of productive workers, the collapse of the mining industry, the floods, the drought, government corruption, government mismanagement, and the International Monetary Fund's policies, especially those of removing subsidies for food and agriculture. Cholera, malaria, and the inadequate national transportation system were viewed as contributing causes. Finally, international institutions and agencies dictated national policies that resulted in a lack of local control of the complex system of factors.

Methodology

I was contracted to develop a famine relief plan for a consortium of 10 agencies in Malawi. Given the complex ecological, ethnic, linguistic, belief, ecological, agricultural, political, and donor situation, I chose an *adaptation* of the published version of future search to develop the famine relief plan. The recommended process is to identify the concern; scan the system for stakeholder groups; invite a representative of each sector to participate in planning the who, what, when, where, and title of the conference; then conduct the conference over three days, starting at noon and ending at noon the third day.

Planning the conference is usually conducted over a period of three to six months. Since the consultancy

contract was only two weeks and famine was imminent, the planning was condensed into a week, and the conference itself was conducted from early one morning to the end of the following day.

Ten agencies invited six participants each, including village women, traditional authorities (chiefs), local hospital authorities, ministry representatives, donor representatives, a field staff, a program or financial staff, and the agency director or his/her delegate. Sixty-one participants attended, representing these diverse sectors.

The process itself was to divide into tables of eight people each, sometimes internal sector groups and sometimes with representatives of each sector at the same table. Small group-organized reporters reported all small-group work to the plenary session after each activity. Each table then shared individual values and reported them. Then they wrote individual, famine, and global histories on 10-meter timeline strips. The groups synthesized the histories into brief synopses. Each table then discussed its "prouds" and "sorries"—what individuals had done or wished they had done to avert famine. They next made a mind-map of the complex set of trends that led to famine and food inadequacy.

The next morning, the groups worked together to construct desired futures for how they wanted the situation to be in a decade. Together, we identified the many themes that surfaced in the desired futures and then identified the items of coincidence across groups. Finally, groups self-organized to develop action plans to achieve the future vision items. Individual and group plans were developed and reported on.

Before leaving, all participants were asked to do a subjective evaluation of the conference.* Two days later, a 77-page conference report was e-mailed to them.

*The analytical methods used were word frequency (wordfreq.exe) and concept analyses of the action plans and the planning conference subjective evaluation.

Results

The conference participants identified five vision themes: constrain malnutrition; constrain mortality; strengthen the Ministry of Health and Population, its health centers, and nutrition rehabilitation units; strengthen the communities' abilities to overcome malnutrition and disease; and strengthen food security in the country. Specific action plans were developed to achieve each vision theme, addressing such items as supplementary food distribution to health centers and villages; screening of children, orphans, HIV/AIDS victims, and pregnant and lactating women; programs to contain malaria and cholera; famine recovery initiatives, including grain storage, crop diversification, and treadle pumps for irrigation. The plans the participants made to achieve the five vision themes, not including the specific action plans, appeared to be very complete.

The evaluations of the process were very positive. Eighty-seven percent of the people who were present at the conclusion filled out evaluations of the method. The process was seen to be highly participatory, inclusive, productive, and respectful by about 95% of the respondents. The lack of simultaneous translation was an obvious failing for a few. Two of the foreign experts felt the process was not adequately professional and effective—it was too slow and made them listen to too many local people. On the other hand, the process appeared to be received as highly appropriate for the Malawian participants.

Whether the conference was a success or not depends on one's perspective and values. Sixty people left it with a concerted plan they had developed.

Planning the conference is usually conducted over a period of three to six months. Since the consultancy contract was only two weeks and famine was imminent, the planning was condensed into a week, and the conference itself was conducted from early one morning to the end of the following day.

World Bank, USAID, and others have initiated more comprehensive efforts to redress both the causes and effects of the famine, including initiatives to redress malaria, irrigation, drought-resistant crops, and health center strengthening. These were all vision actions identified by the participants in the conference. It is unknown what effect the FS had on bringing these strategies to fruition.

Conclusions

In a two-day future search as part of a two-week planning and famine response proposal-writing consultancy, I gained insights into the Malawian situation that would not have been possible in two weeks of reading and talking individually with dozens of interviewees. Moreover, 50 citizens of Malawi gained a sense of

I felt I had to eliminate some of the more developmental activities to write an emergency relief proposal. The donor agency insisted that all mention of whole systems governance processes be eliminated from the proposal and that the interventions be further cut to three elements: supplementary food distribution to the health centers; strengthening the health centers; and monitoring.

According to UNICEF (2003), the outcome of the famine was far less severe than predicted. Many reasons for this have been identified: early response; coordinated action; and overestimation of the severity of the situation.

Furthermore, the

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ownership of the famine response effort that is rarely achieved by foreign experts. It appears that the process was conducive to the type of democratic governance system that the AID Administrator said was so severely lacking in the developing world. Additionally, a holistic, integrated response to a complex set of factors or system that produced famine was developed.

There were differences between *their* plans and what a *consultant* would have written. One difference was in form: a consultant would have standardized all sections to conform to the same writing format. Another difference was that in this instance the people who would have to carry out the activities had developed them: they would not have to be trained in their ideas; they would not have to refer (or not) to a written report or action guidelines; and they would adapt anything that did not work to make it succeed. They would not be willing to let their ideas fail. Other than these points, the goals, objectives, and action plan appeared to be like what a consultant would produce.

Responses to development needs should consider participatory, large-group whole-systems planning methods like the future search and the appreciative inquiry summit. These are inherently more developmental, building self-esteem, ownership, and a sense of mutual dependence. They include the elements of mutuality, ownership, diversity, developing a vision, considering whole complex system/chaos

theory, using coincidence and consensus to determine responses rather than expert opinion, ensuring that local actors, including the benefi-

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ciaries, are respected as equal partners, and planning actions based on self-organizing work groups rather than imposing the implementation mechanism.

In particular, development planning and response efforts should include local participants in an

atmosphere that confirms Solomon Asch's principles for effective dialogue: understanding and valuing each participant's view of the world, validating the villagers' struggles along with the consultant's and Minister's, and inducing an open dialogue. These processes lead to a sense of a true democratic system, the only way that developing countries will become developed and be able to

locally manage the complex systems of markets, production, ethnic diversity, and complex ecologies.

Development cannot be imposed; it must be modeled. Paraphrasing Willis Harman (Mishlove, 1998): "Development is giving away power. Development in this new sense is helping countries to discover their own creativity." **FS**

Malawi FS: Concept Evaluation Results* Evaluation Word and Concept Frequency Analyses

Word Frequencies	Frequency Count	Specific Points Reflected
Time	35	Most suggested to add another day to the planning conference; one suggested to notify with more time, to increase attendance; another that the emergency required better use of time (skip the consulting and plan).
Yes	32	Participatory, inclusive, appropriate, positive.
Planning	30	Effective, positive, future-oriented, included villages and traditional leaders, involved implementers and natives.
Process	22	The process was good, participatory, conclusive, and sharing, summarized by one person's comment: "I liked the way the process invoked creative and critical thinking and active participation. I liked its progression that ended in a more focused planning process."
People	21	Four comments summarized these ideas: "It made me get to know people from other agencies and the various regions/districts. It was also an opportunity to learn from others." "People of different/various angles could easily interact, thereby getting different constructive ideas." "Addresses needs of people and not donors." And "It is very empowering to the indigenous."
Not	20	There were two types of comments using "not:" "It is not easy for NGOs to use the approach but it is the best approach. Keep it up, please!!!" And "The time was too short. It needed much time (more days). Next time give it 4-5 days in order not to rush through."
Lot	20	There were three types of comments with "lot": "I learned a lot from others." "A lot of organizations were able to attend." And "We addressed a lot of the underlying causes of famine."
My	19	Basically, people used "my" to reflect a lot of ownership, as in: "My participation is very important because we are here on behalf of our people or the government. I am sure that what we have discussed shall be implemented with aid from you and other NGOs."
Will	18	"Will" reflected people's voluntary commitment, as in: "Where I will go I will also teach other people what I have collected (learned and decided here)."
Different	18	"Different" was used as in diversity: different opinions were included, different stakeholders participated, different perspectives were considered.
Important	16	People reflected that their participation was important, as in: "Very important; everybody clapped hands for me as I was talking."
Very	29	Lots of emphasis was used in the evaluation comments, as in: "It was very participative." "My being here was very important." "I learned very much." And "It is very easy to plan."
Because	30	The participants gave lots of explanation for their comments, such as: "The planning was very effective because many NGOs and the MOHP were present." "I will be more effective because I made the plans." And "We learned a lot because so many sectors were represented and we had time to talk and listen."

*Those interested in the latest software and methods of qualitative analysis may find more information at <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/qual-software.html>—C.R.

You Might Want to Say "Hello" and "Welcome Neighbor"!

Since April, we have welcomed over 60 new members to the FS Network! Maybe you would like to connect with the folks who are near you and find out what you have in common and how you might work together, support each other, or just get to know each other. You can also use the state/country list in your Membership Directory to find other members in your area. This list is updated regularly and sent to you when you renew your membership. You can also find most members' addresses on our website.*

— Sally Theilacker

New FSN members since April 2004 (as of 11/1/04)

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*That is, on our website, you can find the addresses of those FSN members who remember to enter them and keep them up to date, including, I hope, all of the folks listed above! —Ed.

Working with World Vision, our software and consulting organization (iCohere, www.icohere.com) helped create a process that invited the whole system to participate and focused on drawing forth the core strengths of the organization. Together, we created an “online community” as a way to involve thousands of “virtual participants” in their process, both as a way to help prepare for the four-day Bangkok meeting and engage the whole system during the meeting.

We focused on ensuring that the technology was as invisible as possible and simply served to support the existing communication networks and processes of the organization. A carefully engineered series of communications paved the way and provided a clear purpose for everyone to join the online community and participate.

For four weeks prior to the Bangkok meeting, context-setting memos containing reflective questions were sent to work groups around the world through their normal communication channels. Specific instructions for conducting face-to-face small-group meetings were provided, as well as guidance on how to provide contributions from their meetings through the online community.

Over 4,500 people representing hundreds of small groups met in their local offices to discuss World Vision’s “Big Goals.” Each group shared their stories, reflections, and photos with the rest of the world. By the time of the Bangkok meeting,

World Vision had a great deal of understanding about its core strengths and competencies and, most importantly, had established a mechanism for sharing information and fostering relationships around the world.

As we imagine what the future holds, we believe that we as consultants, technology providers, and OD professionals are limited only by our imaginations, and that new opportunities exist to go beyond our existing thinking of what it means to “bring the whole system into the room”!

The process for the face-to-face Bangkok meeting, which brought together 150 participants representing World Vision’s 100 global offices, was reviewed carefully to determine critical “integration moments” for the virtual participants. A minute-by-minute schedule for translators (the community was available in three languages!) and analysts enabled the flow of information between the room and the online environment in a way that added to the overall process and participant experience.

Each evening, an audio-presentation was recorded and made available in the online community to summarize the day and set a context for the virtual participant, including works of art from the on-site graphic recorder. Structured and unstructured discussion areas in the online community were made available to allow the virtual participants to comment on what had happened in the face-to-face meeting and offer new ideas that emerged from their local group meetings.

The response was overwhelming. Each night, approximately 4,500 people contributed to the conversation (which is 30 times the number of stakeholders able to join the live event!). Each morning, the participants in Bangkok were given succinct summaries of the feedback from the rest of the world for consideration as they moved through the next phase of the

process. A compelling and exciting energy existed in the Bangkok meeting room as the group realized that the rest of the organization was supporting, enhancing, and enlivening their conversations around the world.

Instead of the usual way of reporting the results of a planning meeting in a memo or PowerPoint presentation “after the fact,” the Bangkok participants were actually engaging with the entire organization in a shared experience (including many of the children they serve, who had access to the online community). Through this experience, the World Vision leadership team recognized that a new model of organizational governance had emerged, one that (1) produced higher-quality goals and plans, (2) created the rapid alignment of stakeholders around the world, and (3) enhanced the organization’s readiness for implementation of the goals and plans.

One of the senior members of the planning committee put it well as he reflected on the week: “Now that we know that we can involve everyone, we are obligated to do that. There is no going back.”

For us, coming from a company like iCohere that builds collaborative online communities, we have seen the potential for using technology to help people better communicate, learn together, and share knowledge. To see an organization like World Vision truly embrace “whole system” thinking as a result of the use of technology was a pleasant surprise.

As we imagine what the future holds, we believe that we as consultants, technology providers, and OD professionals are limited only by our imaginations, and that new opportunities exist to go beyond our existing thinking of what it means to “bring the whole system into the room”! **FS**

Praise for Future Search

About three years ago, I joined the Future Search Network and bought a copy of the first edition of Marvin and Sandra's FS guide. I was very enthusiastic and actually gave the book away to a man working in small business development in Kansas.

However, when I returned to teaching at Pearson College, I became very discouraged because I just did not have time to get involved and actually put into practice what I had learned from the guide.

This summer, I was determined to renew my acquaintance and purchased the second edition of the FS guide as well as a copy of *Discovering Common Ground*. I worked very hard to learn as much as I could.

I had offered to do a future search at the college for the returning students as we have had community-building problems for a number of years. Fortunately, the director of the college was open-minded enough to give it a try.

I had to bend the rules: we had 110 participants instead of 70. And I was given only 24 hours instead of 2½ days. I had to drop the last three sessions and run it pretty late into the night of the first day. The team working with me was fantastic, and we got the paper up and managed the logistics perfectly.

The results were stunning! I have used a number of community-building techniques for years when I work on projects among the poor in less-developed countries nearly every summer. I use a modified type of future search, but I have never used the whole thing (minus the common ground and action plan part).

Despite the major surgery that had to be done on the design, I want you to know that the results over that 24-hour period were truly moving. Not only did the students respond with enormous enthusiasm, but the stakeholder meeting among

Not only did the students respond with enormous enthusiasm, but the stakeholder meeting among the faculty and staff almost brought tears to my eyes.

the faculty and staff almost brought tears to my eyes. By going through the process as well, they really opened up, and we had some truly honest dialogue for the first time in many years. The last night, when we brought it all back together for the trends, sorries,

and prouds session, you could hear a pin drop in that large group when the faculty and staff gave their presentations.

In the morning, we did the future scenarios and the presentation of the scenarios, but we had to stop there because we had run out of time. I took down all the paper and rolled it up. It is an amazing portrayal of the diversity of viewpoints in the room. The future scenarios had lots and lots of common ground, and never once did we have arguments and disagreements because everyone understood quite clearly that we were not trying to resolve anything or work it through.

Because I am a full-time college teacher, I will not have time to work on future search conferences. However, I hope our college director allows me to mount the same program next year with the added time necessary to complete the process. I am hoping to take the future search course in Vienna this summer and will contact your office for more details.

Thank you so much for the gift of future search.

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Yemen: A First Experience with FS

Han Rakels

Yemen is a country that has been politically and socially isolated for a long time. It has been very dependent on external support. The re-union of northern and southern Yemen in 1990 was an indication that big changes were on their way. However, the pro-Iraqi attitude during the Gulf war (1990/91) led to the withdrawal of all Saudi-Arabian support, and the civil war of 1994 further worsened the internal situation. With IMF support, it is now slowly recovering from the economic crisis and is facing challenges of how to be a member state of the global society. Yemen is on the list of priority countries of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs to receive support for development.

From April 18-22, around 70 people gathered in the port city of Aden for a future search to address "The Future of Information and Communication Technology in Yemeni Higher Education." (The first university in Yemen was established in 1970 in Sana'a and the second in 1975 in Aden.) The conference was financed through Dutch development cooperation funds and hosted by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Yemen, in the person of Dr. Mohammed Mottahar, Vice Minister.

The purpose was to build a shared vision on utilizing ICT resources for the 10 state universities and community colleges in Yemen and to develop a national ICT policy and master plan. Stakeholder groups selected by the planning team represented university/college vice-chancellors, government officials, Yemeni ICT experts, university/college administrators, university/college ICT managers, library specialists, academicians, and international (Dutch and Tanzanian) experts. Yemeni participants came from all parts of the country.

This was the first time a FS was held in Yemen, and a number of special features characterized it to suit various cultural, organizational, and content-based aspects.

Content-awareness raising: Planners felt that in order to have an in-depth dialogue and make decisions about ICT applications for higher education, there was a need for stakeholders to be informed about potentials, limitations, and examples of applications elsewhere, including the process and impacts that universities in other countries had experienced. Dutch experts and Tanzanian experts delivered short presentations on the day prior to the FS proper. The University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania has undergone a similar change process itself in the past 10 years, and its first-hand experiences and stories gave their Yemeni colleagues a great sense of reality.

Yemeni working days: Most participants were used to working days lasting from around 8:30 am to 2:00 pm. Many spend the afternoon at their "qat" sessions. Qat is a light stimulant, and qat chewing is a social activity that takes an important place in the lives of Yemeni

people. Oftentimes, the shopping for qat begins after lunch. During planning, it was decided to have days from 8:00 am to 2:30 pm, with lunch after 2:30 pm, because there was concern that people might not return after an earlier lunch. Instead, some light snacks and long breaks were provided during the day.

Language issues: The conference language was both English and Arabic, a challenge in itself. About half of the people present were not literate in English. Also, most mixed groups had a non-Arabic-speaking person in them. Instead of arranging for translators and/or technological solutions, it was decided to allow the self-management principle to do the job. People helped each other, and although not everything was caught by everyone all the time, it generally worked well. As a facilitator, I had to rely strongly on the process; it was fairly hard to intervene or know from the remarks whether the group was ready to continue to the next task.

Action Planning and Sponsor Feedback

Seven task forces planned for actions in the common three to six months and committed to the tasks. A small team drafted the proper text for the national policy in the three days after the conference, which was reviewed by stakeholders before formalized approval.

It was the first time that an event of this nature was held in Yemen. The first and last day received extensive national television coverage. Participants were pleasantly surprised by the nonconventional approach of working together for a common purpose and wholeheartedly moved through all four rooms of change. Because of the typical

culture and setting, I asked the sponsor, who was present at the conference for the full period, what his observation had been—how this was different for him and the participants, what had been success factors, what kind of impact he expected, and if he would do it again. His response follows.

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University of Sana'a, Yemen

Planning, Preparation, and Introduction

Future search was an effective tool in enabling us to realize the workshop objectives. The presence of a future search expert who was involved in the planning of the workshop—in terms of clarifying workshop outcomes, identifying the type of people who will participate in the workshop, ensuring that they represent the crucial mix of stakeholders that will represent the whole system—was crucial. Furthermore, the future search specialist was very particular about the number of participants in each of the eight groups to ensure good representation of the whole system in both mixed and homogenous groups, which enhanced the realization of the workshop outcomes.

The planned presentation of written and handout type of materials in a vivid way, at the beginning of the workshop, attracted the participants' attention to the new methodology and increased their readiness to understand its basic

concepts, principles, the importance of important stakeholder involvement, methodology, and applications and ways of action.

The planning and the introduction of the future search methodology was conducted in such a way that it energized the participants, without jeopardizing the achievement of the workshop objectives by becoming an end in itself. Generally, there was a good equilibrium between the process (future search) and the content (workshop).

Participants' Appreciation

The methodology was well appreciated by participants for a number of reasons:

The novelty of the concept was highly appreciated. Participants were eager to learn about it and understand it.

We intend to conduct future search workshops for a number of local consultants, both government and private sector, so they can master the future search methodology and diffuse its use in Yemen and maybe in the Arab world.

The existence of an expert who dealt entirely with the process aspects of the workshop was unusual to them.

The marked difference between future search and the traditional ways of conducting workshops that they have experienced in the past.

Despite the good introduction to the future search concept and methodology at the beginning of the workshop, participants were not feeling at ease, especially when they began to deal with the first workshop activity that dealt with the past—for exam-

ple, writing about important events that happened to them, at the personal and family level, international level, and the ICT level in higher education between the years 1990-1994, and between 1995-1999, and between 2000-2004. Some of the participants expressed their feeling of ambiguity and even frustration

about the process and about the relation between the events at the three levels. But after a little while, they began reluctantly to answer the questions, and they began to realize the relation between the three levels and how they interacted with and influenced each other. The enthusiasm increased and began to gain more momentum, especially once they saw their colleagues begin to write their answers on the big sheets of paper on the walls. The level of enthusiasm increased at each additional level of participation, especially when they began to write their contribution about the present trends of ICT (positive and negative), and about the future vision of ICT in the Yemen higher-education system.

Experienced Differences

The most striking differences in comparison to traditional methodologies are:

- The level of interest and enthusiasm of participants during the workshop from 8:00 in the morning to 2:30 in the afternoon, which is unusual in many traditional workshops.
- The continuity and high level of attendance during the five days of the workshops in comparison to traditional workshops.
- The representation and involvement of the whole system in the room in a well-planned and effective way.
- The team-work spirit that prevailed and continued is higher than in many traditional workshops.
- The level of achievement was higher than in many traditional workshops.
- The level of satisfaction about the workshop was very high as expressed by most of the participants.

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- The participants expressed their high interest of involvement in future related activities.

Success Factors

The key success factors as I perceive them are:

- The whole system approach adopted by the future search methodology and good guidance in its applications by the expert.
- Good planning and involvement of a good mix of representatives of key stakeholders.
- Using the future search as a tool to bring individuals or participants to a high level of spirit sharing and creative involvement during the workshops.
- Participants gradually began to develop from isolated individuals into an effective group or a system that can develop a unified vision that is important for future effective implementation.
- Good coordination between the consultants dealing with process (future search) and consultants dealing with workshop content.

Impact and Future Use

The long-lasting impact from the methodology is difficult to assess at the present time. However, my

impression is that the success of the future search methodology in comparison to the traditional ways of conducting workshops will increase the pressure to adopt the same methodology, or at least will create a strong pressure to innovate the ways of conducting traditional workshops. The participants' satisfaction in the future with traditional workshops will decrease after their experience with the future search methodology.

This was the first time a FS was held in Yemen, and a number of special features characterized this FS to suit various cultural, organizational, and content-based aspects.

Furthermore, some participants expressed their satisfaction with the future search methodology by asking for conducting local workshops to learn and master this new methodology. Others talked about the necessity of developing a local team of experts in future search methodology to increase the benefits of its use to a wider array of organizations at both public and private levels.

We will definitely use future search in the future. We intend to conduct future search workshops for a number of local consultants, both government and private sector, so they can master the future search methodology and diffuse its use in Yemen and maybe in the Arab world. **FS**

And Now . . . FSN/Nepal!!

I have established a local network in Nepal. We are still continuing our programs on single women (widows). Recently, FSN/Nepal has become a member of the "Network for Single Women" (NSW). Members of the committee realized a need to refine and make clearer the objectives of NSW. To do this, a workshop was conducted by FSN/Nepal on August 31, 2004, at the WHR training center, using future search methods.

There were only 10 participants — from the UN, Action-Aid, a gender expert from the university, different organizations working for single women, a government official, Nepal Television, training center, etc.

I started the workshop with the vision question, "How would you like to see NSW in five years time?" The workshop was interesting. Everyone liked the method and were excited to use it in the future.

May Gaufin and Anneli Sundsvik are coming to Nepal in December to do a future search for single women. I am organizing a training program for them. Since FSN/Nepal is newly built, we don't have funds. May and Anneli are also trying hard to generate funds. However, they have promised me to come at their own cost if they cannot get a sponsor.

I am very excited about all of this!

— Sheela Wagle

Editor's note: Sheela Wagle is our first and, thus far, only Nepali FSN member. She, May, and Anneli met at the Learning Exchange in Stockholm. It's fascinating to me to see the international ripples occurring in our network these days, aided not only by our computers, but by the fact that we continue to meet each other, learn about each other, and value each other in face-to-face settings.

Well-Deserved (But Delayed) Credit

I was chagrined to see that Vera Jashni's name was not included in the chapter authors list for the upcoming book on *Leading Systemic School Improvement*. She was my co-author, brainstorming the ideas, editing the first draft, and then doing the difficult work of the final cutting that we had not expected.

— Jean Katz

A Report from the Netherlands

Mario Verweijen and Annemieke Stoppelenburg

After the future search learning workshop in February 2004, the Dutch network is getting on its feet. So we think it is time to introduce our local network to our international friends and colleagues.

A Brief History

In September 2002, Gemma van der Ploeg and Mario were working on a concept for innovation in the public area. There are so many issues in the public field, and the existing ways of handling those issues seem to have lost their effectiveness. We knew that the greater part of the change management methodologies still looked at the world (and its issues) in a very mechanistic way: input > throughput > output—all very linear, from start to finish in a straight line. These kinds of approaches may have worked in times long gone by, but now we had to come up with some kind of methodology that could cope with the following issues:

- There is no longer a single problem owner.
- Solving the problem needs cooperation between numerous parties.
- Those parties feel themselves part of the solution.
- The outcome is no longer predictable.

In that particular timeframe, Annemieke, Gemma, and Eric Spaans went to Philadelphia with their peer group. And they met Marv, Sandra, and future search. The four of us decided to join hands. The February “Managing a Future Search” workshop was the (first) result of that.

We found out that FS was not really new in Holland. A few people had been working in FS. The four of us started the Dutch FSN, and soon

invited the experienced people to join us. A bit later we invited all the “graduates” of the Stockholm Learning Exchange into the network, to share experiences, ideas, and so on. We set up our website. Fortunately, www.futuresearch.nl was available.

The issue we are now facing is how we can get sponsors to believe in the magic of a future search process. We are working as a network on this issue. Consultants and potential clients have come together to make our small world a bit more beautiful.

At this time, we are preparing a network meeting this fall. We'll keep you informed about it, through the listserve or *FutureSearching*, or both.

The Network

The Dutch network now has some 15 members. Names and places can be found on our Dutch website. The network consists of a wide variety of people. Some of us are consultants, others are policy-makers or managers. Some work with large organizations, while others are employed by small firms. Some of us work on a local or regional level, while the work of others is mainly internationally oriented. Some of us are facilitators, others are sponsors.

The variety provides an opportunity to look at things from different perspectives. And it contributes to the feeling that there is a lot to be learned from each other. However, it isn't self-evident that diversity/variety is productive by itself.

The diversity in our Dutch network needs to be managed. One of our strong beliefs is that it must be built as a community of practice in which we are all professionals who

stimulate, question, and support each other in doing future searches.

An Orientation Meeting

For a local government, Eric and Mario conducted a kind of orientation meeting on the issue: “How can elderly and helpless people stay longer in their own environment, instead of going to a nursing home?” A lot of parties are involved in this issue: local government (has to take a leading role), health care, housing, organizations of patients, elderly people, and so on.

We were very fortunate that Sandra and Marvin wrote about their design of a three-hour orientation meeting. That gave us a good start.

For this meeting, we designed a workshop based on the future search principles: we asked the local government to invite all parties they could possibly think of; we had a brief search into the histories. (There were maps with all the health centers and welfare centers, to give everyone an idea of the distribution of resources.) Next, we created a mind-map and indicated the most important trends.

Two major results: First, it was clear to everybody that there is not one stakeholder who solely owns this issue. All parties own a fragment. Second, the local government was asked by the other stakeholders to take a leading role in organizing the process of policy making *together* with all involved.

This was just one city, trying to implement the issue, which is, by the way, national legislation. As far as we can foresee, all cities will have to deal with this. We believe this is very much an issue *designed* for a future search approach. Thank you, national government.

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Ambitions for the Coming Year

First, we'll have our Dutch network meeting in September. We will discuss recent experiences of the network members, we will talk about the issues addressed in the LE in Stockholm, work on the issue of how to get sponsors to believe in the magic of a future search process, look for opportunities for future search by discussing current trends in policy making and business strategies.

We are working on some articles to make FS better known: Gemma and Martijn van der Steen, a graduate, are working on an article from a scientific point of view. They will also address the issue of leadership in the changing governmental environment. Jaap van Warmenhoven is finishing his study of politics and is working on a thesis on participative democracy and how FS can be applied.

Furthermore, we are going to see if it is possible to organize a second workshop, "Managing a Future Search," in the spring of 2005. Finally, in October, we will participate in the masterclass "Dutch Design for Change." A group of international experts will come together in Amsterdam to discuss the future of the several large group interventions. Eliot Marx is one of the co-organizers.

Our Wish

We think it would be a great idea if FSN would plan a "Managing a Future Search" workshop somewhere in the northwest of Europe. Instead of local networks organizing their own learning conferences, all local European networks could then join hands and make sure there are enough participants for the workshop. This would make things much easier. **FS**

Planning Our Tomorrow (The POT Experience)

Diana M. Smith

Three years ago, I facilitated a future search conference for the First Unitarian Congregation of Victoria. Here are some reflections on the process, the outcomes, and the learnings I've had as both a facilitator and leader in the church.

The POT weekend was framed and led by a strategic planning group made up of both long-time leaders and new members. They were interested in a creative, engaging approach to involvement of members, and were very receptive to the ideas and concepts of future search. We planned the weekend about two months after our first conversation.

The Process: We began on Friday night, with a four-hour session focused on the past, and then spent all day Saturday with a focus on the present, leading up to the assignment of groups for Future Scenarios about 3:00 pm. On Sunday morning, the church service consisted of the presentation of the Future Scenarios. It was engaging and very inspiring, as everyone had a chance to participate. We created large floor murals for the children to draw on during the service, and many of their images then adorned the walls for the rest of the service. We then reconvened for lunch and the action planning in the afternoon.

The Outcomes: Following the future search, the planning group took the outcomes and developed a strategic plan for the church, which was formally adopted about three months later. It emerged as a five-year strategy with specific goals and objectives in four key areas. And it has been the driving force for the church since that time.

In the planning, we confronted a number of barriers to participation, including reticence to spending a whole weekend for planning (reflective of the larger climate of volunteer burnout), conflicting events that weekend, and the announcement of the resignation of the minister a couple of weeks before the date of the event. Youth were also reluctant to participate.

During the event, 40 individuals (out of a membership of 280) participated in the future search, reflecting a spectrum of ages, experience, and perspectives. They were engaged, interested, and committed. The resulting strategic plan has guided the work of the church since that time.

Some Reflections

So it's three years later. And here are my reflections. Some of the inspiring vision and energy of that process have dissipated from my perspective, and it is time to engage once again. In retrospect, we did not, after the event, consciously involve those individuals who attended, unless they were on a committee or involved in the formal leadership of the church. Action reverted to the formal committee and governance structure, so it has become a "blueprint" rather than a more organic pathway to the future.

The process has served the church well, and we are now looking at what's next in terms of a strategic look at our future. What are your thoughts? Another future search? An appreciative inquiry approach? Let me know what you think, at smith@ecosolcan.com **FS**

"Compelling Case Studies That Illustrate the Power of Future Search"

(From the publisher's website: www.scarecroweducation.com)

Future Search in School District Change: Connection, Community, and Results. Edited by Rita Schweitz and Kim Martens. Introduction by Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff. Scarecrow Education, \$45.95, paper. Series: Leading Systemic School Improvement #3.

Here are 16 compelling case studies that illustrate the power of future search to create lasting, whole-system change. It chronicles ways in which educational institutions have used broad-based stakeholder involvement to improve education. These experiences, by individual authors—many of whom are school superintendents, directors, and education professionals—will help those tasked with

improving education by offering ideas that have proven successful.

These cases document innovative initiatives in rural, suburban, and urban schools on such key issues, including:

- District mergers
- Healing racial divisions
- Curriculum reform
- Developing community partnerships
- Creating district-wide strategic plans

The book also contains important educational themes, such as:

- Early childhood education
- Improving the performance of school boards
- Improving student health
- Improving achievement

For superintendents, school board members, district administra-

tors, and anyone else with an interest in high-involvement/high-performing schools and districts.

About the Authors

Rita Schweitz is a senior partner with Changeworks of the Rockies. She is a facilitator and consultant, designing and facilitating processes to help organizations meet their goals. With over 25 years of national and international experience, she specializes in bringing the whole system together to establish collaborations, find common ground, and move quickly to action.

Kim Martens is a facilitation and training consultant with over 20 years in the fields of whole-system change and community development. She has extensive experience in participatory strategic planning that includes all stakeholders and emphasizes client ownership of the process and results.

"The Best on This Topic"

(From the publisher, Berrett-Koehler)

You Don't Have to Do It Alone by authors Richard H. Axelrod, Emily M. Axelrod, Julie Beedon, and Robert W. Jacobs, was reviewed in the October 10 issue of *The New York Times*!

Referring to the book, "Off the Shelf" business columnist Paul Brown writes, "The best of the current crop of books on this topic... a complete blueprint for involving others."

The authors—Richard H. Axelrod, Emily M. Axelrod, Julie Beedon, and Robert W. Jacobs, consultants all—are effective in presenting, step by step, what it takes to involve people. Whatever

project you are considering, they say, the process begins by asking the same five questions:

- What kind of involvement is needed?
- Who needs to be included?
- How can I get them to participate?
- How do I keep them involved?
- And, once the right people are included, how do I finish the job successfully?

Then they show how to answer each question. In deciding what employees to include, for example, the authors explain that while managers need people with expertise to complete the task, they can't stop there. In building a team, managers

also need people who care, people who have a stake in the outcome, people with the authority to get things accomplished, and people with different points of view (to make it easier for the best ideas to emerge). Obviously, different team members may fill more than one role.

The book occasionally becomes too basic. In a discussion of how to influence people to participate, the authors write: "Talk about your project in a way that is galvanizing. When you speak with passion, people will want to join you."

But that is a minor quibble. The book gives a complete blueprint for involving others.

Defending Defensiveness

by Sandra Janoff

Shifting your world-view can mean rethinking your place in the larger picture. This frightens many people because it is destabilizing.

On Embarrassing Myself: When Will I Grow Up?

Not long ago, I was regaling a friend with my strong views on systems change. “There is no such thing as sustainable change!” I said, “People have to keep discovering for themselves how they can best respond to the changing world.” When I got no answer, I repeated what I had just said. Without waiting for a response, I reworded my assertion and said it again. At last I paused for breath.

“I don’t agree,” my friend said mildly. “We have to keep looking for ways to *insure* sustainability. The most important thing in any change process is making sure that it lasts.”

“Lasting is not the issue,” I shot back, with some vehemence. “What we do *each step of the way* is the issue.” I was determined to win what had now become an argument. I felt we were on different wavelengths. How would I defend myself and the rightness of my point in what had become a very unpleasant situation? I secretly deployed my ultimate weapon. I simply wrote him off. Once discounted, this person became unimportant to me, not worthy of my time.

In full self-righteous bloom, I now felt superior. I put myself on automatic pilot, driven entirely by an unconscious impulse. I could neither see nor hear anything outside of my construct of the interaction. More, I had shut down parts of myself—my curiosity, my openness, and my capacity to appreciate the complexity of the situation. I had originally wanted my point heard. Now I was stuck with the busywork of looking for rationales to protect my ego. It was some hours later, reflecting on this difference of opinion that had turned into an unpleasant exchange, that I remembered that this was not the first time a conversation had gone off-track due to my insistence on “being heard” (read: being right).

Now I have known this weakness in myself for some time. I am, after all, a grown-up psychologist, not a little kid. But that is exactly the point. I consider myself an expert adult and still couldn’t get myself heard! In an eye blink I had reverted to a childhood strategy for protecting myself. I had become defensive—in a good cause, I thought—but not to good effect.

The worst part is the fact that my expertise lies in facilitating difficult conversations among contentious players in large diverse groups. But human dynamics are filled with contradictions that we hear about regularly, for example, organizations that offer conflict resolution but can’t stop their own internal fighting, or anti-poverty agencies that pay staff less than a living wage. We all have so much growing up to do. In this article I want to outline some thoughts on personal and organizational defensiveness.

Taking Things Personally

Taking things personally and needing to be “right” (feel superior) can adversely affect the health of our organizations. Granted, we all live at the center of our own universes, but working with others in systems requires a mental shift—from seeing yourself as *the* central character with “the right” view to experiencing that you are *one of many players* who have a full spectrum of views. Shifting your world-view can mean rethinking your place in the larger picture. This frightens many people because it is destabilizing.

Here is an extreme example. When Copernicus discovered that the earth was not at the center of the universe in the early 1600s, he held back from making it public and died not knowing the impact of his work. When Galileo announced it 50 years later, he was imprisoned and forced to renounce his belief—and he spent the rest of his life in jail. It was such a hard pill to swallow for the religious and politically

powerful people in the seventeenth century because it implied that “man” was simply a part of nature and not superior to it, which ran counter to the theories of the day.

How does this translate to everyday life with work systems? If we believe that every nonprofit organization—along with the communities we work in and our field of endeavor—really *are* systems, then we have to act on its most important precept: no one part is superior *or* inferior to any other part. That doesn’t mean losing our credibility or sense of self, but developing the ability to see the connections we have to everything else, the dependence we have on each other and the “both/and” nature of things. That means not taking things personally—not being wedded to seeing things one way (my way).

Defensiveness: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

We use defensiveness as a protective armor to help us maximize our pleasure and security, and minimize our internal conflict and anxiety. Unfortunately, and perversely, it often has the reverse effect.

We all learn defensive mechanisms as small children, developing strategies when we have few choices, little consciousness, and few ways to protect against thoughtless adults or hurtful peers. In those early years when we learn how to defend ourselves, the process is as inevitable as it is benign. We keep anxiety at bay by turning down the volume of adult demands, retreating into ourselves, throwing temper tantrums, drawing pictures, or going outside to play. Indeed, all these ploys work pretty well.

As we grow up, we adopt adult versions of our defenses. We can also add a layer by developing defenses for our defensiveness. For instance, we may feel so aggressive about an opposing point of view that we look for others who share *our* view, have outraged conversations with them, and create alliances to feel supported in our “rightness.” Additionally, some of us go to work in organizations, usually hierarchical, with all sorts of triggers to childish feelings and behavior.

Unfortunately, complex systems very often reproduce problems at many different levels. How we act individually will often be

reproduced organizationally, even throughout an entire field. In my opening story, I personally retreated from continued conversation with my colleague. When leaders act that way, it should come as no surprise when their organization similarly retreats from difficult interactions or disagreements. In fact, it might do so to save its leader from losing face, status, or positioning. This can have some disastrous results—blockading the progress of collective learning and preventing the development of optimal strategies and collective clout. In fact, a major reason for organizational limitations can be leaders’ personal “issues.” Let’s try to get a grip on this!

Leaders’ Anxiety About Losing Control

Many of us look to leaders of organizations to be confident and unflappable; so it can be especially difficult to appear unsure of how to proceed in a particular situation. It’s also true that we don’t like to lose face. In fact, if we are in an organization that has traditionally functioned in a parent/child hierarchical mode, all may collude in the fantasy that leaders have or should have within themselves all that it takes to set organizational direction. This is just plain silly, especially in the world we are living in.

Today’s rate of change is explosive and has gone beyond what our individual psyches and intellects can tolerate. Thinking skillfully about how to direct an organization takes multiple skills, ongoing dialogue, and a variety of perspectives. To make it work, *all* must feel able to discuss their own points of view, and *all* must feel commitment to the whole of the organization and its constituents. The role of the leader, therefore, is to create the conditions for *all* to understand the whole and contribute to constructive next steps.

Maybe this role is less alluring than one that pretends to have all the answers, but in the end it will work better. The trick to being this kind of leader is in learning to contain your own anxiety while *acknowledging*, *mobilizing*, and *transforming* your organization’s capability for constructive action.

Here are some simple insights that might help:

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How we act individually will often be reproduced organizationally, even throughout an entire field.

Keep the purpose
front and center.
Your group
members' job is to
do the best they
can in the time
they have—and
that's your job, too.

Acknowledge and Contain Your Own Anxiety

My first suggestion may seem so simplistic, it could be easily dismissed, but it's the essence of good leadership. When you feel that you are losing control because the group you are working with is acting out of control, become aware of your rising anxiety and don't act impulsively. Contain your anxiety! Then try a path different from the one you would normally take.

If your tendency is to flood the air with words to quiet the din around you, force yourself to keep quiet. On the other hand, if your tendency is to withdraw, then force yourself to stay in the conversation. In either case, be aware of how your behavior, under the stress of tense and sometimes virulent disagreements, acts as a model to others in the room. Once you abandon your habitual response, you may wish to check and acknowledge anxiety elsewhere in the room. Ask people to say where they are on the issue. You'll get a more differentiated, realistic picture of where the group is. Keep the purpose front and center. Your group members' job is to do the best they can in the time they have—and that's your job, too.

Mobilize Energy and Transform Group's Capability to Act

No matter what the circumstance is, internal or external, you don't have to solve every last problem on the table to be successful. Do you know the 80/20 rule? We spend 80 percent of our time struggling over the 20 percent of things we don't agree on. Change the focus. Instead of looking at where you're apart, focus on where you're together. What's the common ground? Help group members determine where they're in agreement. If there is shared energy on some issues, start working immediately on those. What about the issues people don't agree on? Make a "not agreed" list. *Acknowledge* the divisive issues. Take that information into account as you move forward, and help the group figure out how to attend to them later. You will be surprised at how much energy there is when you don't have to negotiate every conflict immediately. The "not agreed" issues won't disappear; you

One of the most powerful things you can do when your group is dealing with its differences is make sure that no one ever hangs out on a limb alone and becomes a scapegoat. The way to interrupt scapegoating is counterintuitive. Instead of ignoring the person or convincing them that they are wrong, get them an ally. Ask "who else feels that way?" When the person is validated, the group stays whole and can move on.

can handle them at another time with more information. They just don't have to be turned into action items at that moment. Agreeing to work on common ground despite unresolved differences is a transforming step.

You will also limit people's need to be right by not giving in to a "win/lose" mentality in the group. You will eventually create a community that has bonded in active service to what it *can* do together.

Finally, don't ignore the fact that anxiety is energy, sometimes called "blocked excitement," and it can fuel progress if you work *with* it in the group. Remind others in the group about this and about the fact that change always elicits some discomfort. We don't fully know what is facing us. Try to get to the point where most of your discomfort is simply curiosity about what will happen next. Check the group and find out who else is curious. It may sound corny, but you can mobilize the group's energy when you have common ground on which to act and curiosity as a framework for taking a next step. I promise you something different *will* happen.

If I Make the Effort to Evolve, Will My Nonprofit Follow Suit?

If it wants to be effective, your nonprofit doesn't have a choice but to evolve.

What is an evolved, mature organization? It is one where members have developed the ability to solve increasingly complex problems with external as well as internal part-

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ners. A mature organization is one that can manage and resolve its task and process problems as they arise and move forward consciously, reflecting on how they are doing. The process of going from an immature group to an evolved group involves discovering new skills, insights, creative ideas, and points of view. When the group gets stuck, the leader champions the will to stay engaged, researching the issues, working through differences, and finding common ground for action that deploys the energy of all those in and around the organization. In this way, the smallest group can act powerfully as part of a larger system. It is the soul of an adaptive organization, as described by Carl Sussman in the Winter 2003 issue of the *Nonprofit Quarterly*.

Most of us aspire to work with others in a collegial, collaborative way, but when we let defensive behavior into the mix, things can go off-track. Your job as leader is to help groups find a way forward, even when differences seem acute, directing the energy to areas of agreement. Your job is also to be mindful of what you can control and what you can't control. You can control who's involved in planning decisions. You can control who has access to what information. You can control the conditions under which people work together. You can't control people's behavior but you can, by your own behavior, set standards for inclusion and continuous, courageous learning.

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When the group gets stuck, the leader champions the will to stay engaged, researching the issues, working through differences, and finding common ground for action that deploys the energy of all those in and around the organization. In this way, the smallest group can act powerfully as part of a larger system.

Come to the FSN Learning Exchange in Northern Ireland Next June!

An intercontinental planning group has come together to put enthusiasm, energy, and effort into the next Learning Exchange in Northern Ireland, June 9-11, 2005. Our first conference call brought together Mario Verweijen from the Dutch network; Jon Harvey in Oxford, UK; Eamonn O'Dwyer in Dublin; Sandra Janoff in Philadelphia; Douglas O'Loughlin in Singapore; Cynthia de Windt in Copenhagen; and Tara Haughian in Belfast. Other valued members of the planning group are Elaine Gaudet in Canada and Fran Ryan in Oxford, UK.

We have discussed how can we look at the challenges to the FSN as it expands its role worldwide, linking to the larger issues of Peace and Cooperation in the World.

As planners, we want to consider how we can tap into the principle of creativity similar to the scenario creation phase in an actual future search. And how the methodology can make the Learning Exchange attractive to current practitioners while considering the needs of newcomers, both learners and users.

And, of course, the job of the local team in Ireland is to make sure that people have a wide range of opportunities to experience the "40 shades of green" when they arrive. A warm welcome will await everyone coming to the 2005 FSN Learning Exchange.

Do come and join us all in Northern Ireland next June!

—Tara Haughian, for the Planning Group

An Enriching Experience in Spain

Grethie Coetzee

Dear FS Colleagues,

John Goss has asked me to write a bit on my recent facilitation experience in Spain. Actually, I owe you all an apology for not having written earlier, but one reason is that I have not yet come to that quiet place where I have been able to reflect on the impact and meaning of the experience on my life. It is difficult to convey this very deep, enriching experience in a few words. Facilitating in Spain at the events for the Parliament of the World's Religions was one of the best experiences of my life. I never imagined I would learn so much, receive so much. But starting at the beginning.....

I think it was around February when John mentioned that the Future Search Network had received a request for volunteers to help facilitate at the Parliament for the World's Religions in Barcelona. When he asked me for the second time around if I had applied, I thought I'd better take a proper look at what was required, before he asked me again.

Of course, when I completed the application form, I did not have any idea that this would really come true. Even when they did the interview a few weeks later, I did not believe I'd be able to go. In actual fact, I completely ignored the matter, ignored all the e-mail talk about travel booking, travel arrangements, visa requirements, air tickets, etc.

The whole affair was just too totally unrealistic for me. I had just recently started my own business, and affording the trip was just unimaginable. It was work without pay! I was to be responsible for my own airfare, food, and lodgings. To cut a long story short, three weeks before my flight, I realized I was on their final list and they were expecting me. By pure miracle, they sponsored my flight and lodgings, and my parents mostly took care of the rest. So I arrived in Spain for a two-week facilitation in mid July. But we were not going to use the future search methodology.

We were recruited by The Council for Parliament of the World's Religions to facilitate two events, the first in Montserrat and the second in Barcelona. Both these events were a progression of leaders' gatherings that began in 1893, then again in 1993 in Chicago and in 1999 in Cape Town. The object was to foster the contribution of religious and spiritual communities to a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world. The first week was spent at Montserrat, the second in Barcelona. At Montserrat, we had our preparation and our training. Two kinds of facilitation were to be used, each very different from the other.

The Montserrat Facilitation

We were uncertain how many delegates would pitch up, but had a rough expectation of about 400. These people were already part of the movement, and all had different reasons for coming to this event. As

a group, they had a religious motivation in common and shared the basic vision of preparedness to discuss the contribution their different faiths could make toward a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world. Other than that, they had little in common.

From a group facilitation perspective, you can probably imagine the difficult task of getting cooperation, shared vision, and motivation into task action. They didn't know and probably didn't want to get to know each other better. Didn't really want to work together, share responsibility, or even coordinate action!

Fortunately, the task was easy because months ahead, even years ahead, some of the world's best consultants had been working around the clock designing the method that this event would use. They decided that the primary objective of the facilitation was to inspire the various leaders into simple and profound acts that would each contribute to one or all of four major issues:

- Supporting refugees
- Creating access to clean water
- Eliminating the burden of international debt on poor countries, and
- Overcoming religiously motivated violence.

The design included a series of conversations spread over three days: half day, full day, half day, with 2 overnights (like FS). These conversations took place in small groups, each with a circle facilitator (of which I was one). The circles followed principles of self-management (like FS). Unlike future search, the aim was not to create a shared vision and coordinated effort toward that vision. The participants were to be inspired to a specific commitment to foster a practical

In short, my experience in Spain was a life-changing one, an inspiring one, and I am totally blessed to have been able to have this experience. My life wish is to somehow stay involved as a facilitator, to grow my facilitation experience, and to repeat this over and over again.

response by their religious and spiritual communities to the issues presented and make potential connections between their local situations and the global dynamics involved.

Each of the four issues had its own team: a team leader; lead facilitator; co-lead facilitator; various circle facilitators; a graphics lead, with his team of graphics helpers; a logistics lead, with his team of logistics helpers; and then also a team of support facilitators to help and mentor the circle facilitators in need. The last group I mentioned was a team of people highly skilled in conflict resolution and experts on diversity.

We were fully trained in what was expected from each role. I also received full documentation of each step of both events before I even flew to Spain. We also did a simulation as part of the training. By the time the participants came, we were ready and charged for each possible scenario and full of expectation for achieving our objectives as the facilitation team.

When the actual event took place, it was easy. Everybody knew what to do, who to talk to, how to handle every crisis. We were fully prepared/overprepared, fully qualified/overqualified. Being able to handle anything from heart attacks to a shooting of any of the religious leaders attending the event!

The Barcelona Facilitation

Barcelona was totally different. At Barcelona, our team was responsible for everything, even the logistics of the accommodations (room keys, etc.)! We had no idea how many participants would attend. Our event was one of the hundreds of events at the Forum, a cultural event in the category of the Olympic games. So we didn't know if 400 or 12,000 would come. Whether each circle facilitator would mentor a few groups with less involvement or not. We didn't know how many for

each issue would attend, so we couldn't plan our ratio. Also, as a team we were scattered all over Barcelona, and team cohesion was much more difficult to achieve.

To make matters worse, we had to change our venue, so the whole graphic design was very difficult to utilize as planned. But we coped. Many fewer people attended these meetings. I think the competition of attendance of other events was just too great. Also the advertisement of our event was a logistical nightmare. I don't think the participants understood that they all had to participate in one of the four issues and then attend the rest of what the program offered. Most people were not aware of our event, and the commitment of two days was too much. There were just too many other more pressing, exciting events taking place at the same time. I am not sure if more than 300 in total attended the Barcelona event! In the future, I doubt if the organizers will stage an event to coincide with something like the Forum. It was like attending a world show, with millions of exciting things to do and see, all happening at the same time. So for us as a team, though many of us were free to do sightseeing, or anything else, we were largely disappointed that we could not do what we had been trained or come to do at the Barcelona event.

Outcomes

The spirit of love, peace, tolerance of difference was simply amazing. This was something that was created at Montserrat and simply carried through to the Barcelona event. The Design team impressively fostered a team spirit that spread to the Montserrat participants, and then to Barcelona. It was incredible to work alongside such competent, experienced, and wonderful colleagues.

The thing that made the most lasting impression on my life out of this experience is that I am, in a

sense, totally changed by this one impressive thing, experiencing this spirit of love, peace, tolerance of difference. I never fathomed I'd experience this outside the walls of my own faith tradition! Having to comment on the experience of the design, I could just go with the flow, because the design team prepared so thoroughly. This reminds me of the utter importance of the preparation of the design team; having clear leadership and defined roles.

It was a privilege to meet up with Sandra again and sit in a session watching and learning how she presented and explained the method to people knowing little or nothing about the technique. Aideen McGinley, from Ireland, a colleague who inspired me a lot, did the presentation with Sandra. The situation that she presented was one that is very similar to the IDP here in South Africa. She came from the perspective of municipality and the goals of good governance. I wish we could get her here in South Africa, because I believe her tales of her experience with future search especially would do much to motivate those institutions that we as FS facilitators hope will finance future searches in South Africa.

In short, my experience in Spain was a life-changing one, an inspiring one, and I am totally blessed to have been able to have this experience. My life wish is somehow to stay involved as a facilitator, to grow my facilitation experience, and to repeat this over and over again. I believe I will then be able to be my best. But that is my challenge because the job that I am doing now is so completely out of line with this. This is also probably why it took me so long to write some kind of report about this experience because it reminds me of how far I am from repeating it.

I am forever grateful because I could not have imagined what this inspiration would lead me to. **FS**

At the Stockholm Learning Exchange: Exploring “Big Mistakes”

At the Stockholm Learning Exchange last May, one discussion group formed to talk about “Big Mistakes” its participants had made and what could be learned from them.

What follows is a report from five of the discussants, plus Paul Hedlund’s summarizing comments. — Ed.

1. Han Rakels, Holland

Timelines going around the “wrong” way

I conducted a future search in Yemen in April 2004 with a multi-lingual and multi-cultural (Dutch, Africans, Palestines, and Yemenites) participant group. The working language would be Arabic, with English translations. The handouts, agenda, and workbook had been translated into Arabic, and translators had been recruited and briefed on the principles and the process.

The sponsor gave a strong introduction, and after getting acquainted, we were ready to go to the past. Participants enthusiastically filled the timelines...writing from right to left! Fortunately, most participants realized that they had to write the other way around, and no real harm was done. So, friends, beware if you as Westerners find yourselves in Arabic or Chinese-speaking circles.

No-Show of Stakeholders

A consultancy firm had embarked on a future search to build a new future vision (and actions). The planning team had some doubts that they could get important clients (who were also financiers and visionaries) on board, including a key stakeholder, a very close partner (great interdependency), but with a problematic relationship with the firm. The

time for planning was a bit short, but they thought they could do it.

However, the stakeholders refused to come to the conference. They felt they would not be able to control themselves emotionally and so would “make trouble” and “spoil” the event. The sponsor did his best to get them on board, but was unsuccessful. Thus, the system was incomplete. The show went on anyway, but the energy wasn’t what it could have been. The group that remained was pretty harmonious, but ingredients for different viewpoints were missing.

At the end, I felt that the group was disappointed that they were largely discovering what they already knew. And some, of course, blamed this on the process and the facilitators.

What could I have done? Probably, I could have, right at the start of the FS, pointed out that the missing part of the system had serious consequences for the dynamics and the outcomes. Also, I could have asked the group if they would be willing nevertheless to continue or take other actions. It would have put the issue open on the table, allowing the group to find out and decide what they wanted, giving them responsibility for the outcome. I didn’t do this and learned a great lesson!

2. Michael Schwartz, United States

Missing Stakeholder Group

In the Healthy Community Future Search, the Steering Committee agreed that one of the stakeholder groups should be “ordinary citizens” appropriately identified. They did not, however, invite this group. During the future search, in the reality dialogue, it was noted by several participants that this stakeholder group was absent. This made it more difficult to come to conclusions on which areas to do action planning.

Lack of Focus

In the same future search, the visioning of a desired future was outstanding, but there were so many issues that related to a “healthy community” (e.g., education, transportation, government, health care, recreation, the arts, business environment, etc.) that it became difficult in the reality dialogue to pinpoint areas for action planning. It was suggested that a narrower focus on a few well-defined issues would have constituted a better approach.

3. Fran Ryan, United Kingdom

Lots of things were not ideal about a FS I facilitated. I have heard stories of people getting lots of things wrong and still having a great FS. But not *this* one!

Here are the three critical mistakes in reverse order of importance. Although I know I did my best, I feel that at the time if we’d avoided the last “mistake,” it could have been turned round. At the very least, I would have felt I’d tried my best and couldn’t have done any more.

• Complicated task that was difficult to grasp: “How can we transform the way ICT is designed and used to help young learners from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve their full potential?” Too complex and, as it turned out, not clear; for example, poor urban white boys needed to be included.

• Academic stakeholders, at least one of whom was partly in competition with the sponsor (it turned out later), and many who did not like the paradigm (data collection and analysis not rigorous, not enough “experts” in the room, etc., etc.). Rumor suggests the revolt started here!

• Things were rumbling before, but at Common Ground there was a revolt. One of the ethnic minority leaders in the group, a

very charismatic, powerful national figure, threw down the gauntlet. He couldn’t see how the complex stuff on the common ground wall could help. There was a longish discussion initially led by us (two relatively experienced FS people). The group basically decided they wanted to talk to each other rather than take on any of the tasks that were emerging. We made a dignified retreat. On a group dynamic level, I felt the group retreated from a “too difficult” task. (I didn’t have this insight at the time, but will always bear it in mind for the future.)

What could I have done? First, of course, working more with the planning team to get the task right and being more careful about the briefing. In addition, if this happened again, I would take more control of the process (after all, we were being paid to create a facilitative environment within which they could do their work) and give the group a clear choice. I suspect if I had had

the courage and wisdom to do that then, enough people would have wanted to do enough work for at least some of it to get done. The door was open but I didn’t see it at the time. I saw it two hours later. Too, too late.

We made a dignified retreat. On a group dynamic level, I felt the group retreated from a “too difficult” task. (I didn’t have this insight at the time, but will always bear it in mind for the future.)

So my big mistake was not having the courage to do my job! It was a costly lesson but I am ready for the next one!

With this one, maybe it was always going to be impossible. (Maybe taking the Open Space dictum, “whatever happens is what’s meant to happen,” the group got to do the work it needed to do.) Apart from feeling upset and deflated by the experience, I also felt huge responsibility that the process of FS was labeled as a failure, when in reality lots of other

variables (including poor facilitation at that point) had been the problem.

In retrospect, perhaps doing Open Space might have been a better place to start. There wasn’t any need for a planning community (we talked about this quite a lot at the planning stage) as such, so FS might not have been the right intervention. So, as Marv says, “Everything works and everything fails.”

I was hugely grateful to the large group that were gathered round to debrief this at the Learning Exchange. There might, just might, have also been a slight (well, once a Catholic ...) need to confess and receive absolution. So thank you all.

4. Jon Harvey, United Kingdom

Here is an extract from a letter that I wrote to the sponsor in response to his complaints about the engagement of the young people (and other things that went wrong with the event, in his view):

“With regard to the children and young people being at the ‘heart of the event’—this was always key to our design and facilitation. Our reasons for putting the children and young people together for the morning and first part of the afternoon of the first day were precisely because of this.

“In our view—given the small numbers of children and young people present—it would have meant many of them being alone at a table of adults right at the start. We judged that their voices could easily have been drowned out, and so we decided that it would help their confidence and voice to arrange things as we did. Indeed, we might

argue that the fact that they were so vocal in their assertions (principally over the lunch hour on day one) was testament to their confidence and security. Both myself and my co-facilitator worked hard with some of your colleagues to persuade them to stay into the afternoon and beyond—and we were successful. We believe that their contribution was much valued by all the participants—we still have ringing in our ears one young woman’s comment about what would happen after the event!

“Of course, in hindsight, it is possible to say

now that had the young people and children been mixed in (as it were) earlier and more during day one,

Overall, what I learned was that I should have walked away or else had a very difficult meeting with the sponsor just before the event to clear up some of the matters that came around eventually to bite us!

continued on page 22

that things would have been different. But our judgment was made on the basis of our experience and in good faith. We also responded to what they were saying and made all efforts to ensure their voices were heard. Indeed, their obvious presence around one table made it very clear to all present that they were here and were at the heart of the event. Scattered, their presence may not have had such an impact."

There were other points of contention, too (my letter back to him was nearly 3,000 words long!). Overall, what I learned was that I should have walked away or else had a very difficult meeting with the sponsor just before the event to clear up some of the matters that came around eventually to bite us! Wrestling with these complications on the floor of the event was *not* the best way!!

5. Éline Gaudet, Canada

Joining the Big Mistakes conversation at the Learning Exchange in Stockholm seemed the best way to continue muddling through my Big Puzzle as a result of a FS held in Ottawa, 1999. The puzzle was regarding what happened one year after the FS just as we were planning the first reunion. Everything had seemed perfect. The original FS planning team was strong, diverse, focused, and energetic. The conference itself was exciting, productive, and facilitated by three highly qualified FS facilitators who were trusted friends and colleagues.

One year later, the reunion team was committed and looking forward to the sponsor group celebrating many of the projects that had become a reality. Then, just weeks before the reunion, an announcement was made to change from a bilingual school to a unilingual English school. The community embarked on a major roller-coaster

ride spiraling from denial to confusion and finally to serious wounds for those who stayed, and "death" for the huge number that left the school community.

My puzzle was: How could this have happened? How did we miss the "bigness" of the bilingual issue? It was always present during the FS, as common ground to work toward and as an unresolved issue, and a few of the FS projects aimed to continue addressing the question of bilingualism. So the big mistake here might come under the heading "Personal engagement and ignoring contentious issues."

Some specifics:

1. Some issues will likely never be resolved in my lifetime. "Shucks!" says me the optimist and addict to FS, the ultimate democratic process for groups. I still wonder how much we open and stay with the reality dialogue when faced with a big unresolved issue and have found a "new" courage to just go for it and "whatever happens, happens," regardless of its bigness.

2. The outcome was not so surprising given the Canadian socio-cultural context, where bilingualism has always been and continues to be an issue. Although I knew what happened was in fact a microcosm of our country, I was personally convinced that "our community" was way above this, and that we were on solid common ground. The gift has been a great personal distinction between what I call a bilingual/multicultural Canadian and the person who speaks more than one language. I

also learned to avoid ever getting smug and safe about perceived shared values and common ground.

3. Finally, I have stopped wondering how I had contributed to the disastrous outcome. It was not me, nor the future search process.

Nice ending, you could say.... Thanks to the caring, insightful, and generous folks in the Big Mistakes conversations, I have found a place for the puzzle pieces and can now see it for what it is!

6. Summarizing Remarks by Paul Hedlund

As about 25 of us facilitators discussed these issues, it was clear that there was an important attitude of reflection. Piqued curiosity blended with humility, and depth of commitment was

refreshing. The consultants' feelings about these so-called problem areas were awesome as well as insightful. Future search consultants should aspire to have the sort of egos and discipline that promote critical review from self as well as from peers.

We not only are users of the tools but also keepers of the principles. The sharing in our session evidenced the humility, reverence, and learning that future search exemplifies. This session helped us to learn from our past in order to understand our future. I think this needs to be a central point; otherwise, we could not learn as we have. Perhaps this is something you do not report or write about because of its nature and spontaneity, but those present certainly witnessed it! **FS**

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FS in Transitional Societies: Some Insights for Us All

(An Open Space discussion group at the 2004 Learning Exchange, Stockholm. —Ed.)

Ruth Feldman

Having spent time in Moldova, the former Soviet Union (FSU), and most recently in the Czech Republic, I had a desire to discuss practical ways in which we could utilize FS principles and practice in transitioning democracies as they (re)build civil societies. Beyond just a cross-cultural issue, I have found that formerly closed, non-transparent societies present a special challenge to future search as a meeting methodology, and I wanted others' thoughts on this topic.

For this session, we were a self-selected discussion group of about eight participants (men and women) with diverse global, professional, sector, ethnic, and FS experience. The following are highlights from our conversation that I believe can provide a good reminder and framework for us all as we work with a diverse array of systems.

The illusion of inclusion or illusion of democracy in still-struggling societies. It is difficult to introduce FS as a way to develop common ground when there exists only the illusion or façade of really being included in any change. Skepticism runs high, and many people in these circumstances don't truly believe they can have an impact. In this case, it seems particularly important to have the *right people in the room*—those who can effect change—and to publicize who those committed people are in order to develop some trust in the process and be models for others to feel not only included but relevant.

Even grassroots/citizen action groups can be nontransparent. Often they can become just as much a part of the old political system. It is important to recognize their role, and possible limitations, in trying to create balance in the invited group of participants.

Refugees, as a group in many examples (communities), are a big issue. There is a strong need to address their issues holistically and keep that factor in mind as stakeholder groups are identified.

By definition, FS goes against the norm in certain cultures. During a FS, we say that everyone's voice is equal, which may be unheard of or even perceived negatively. For these circumstances, we may want to articulate the idea of equal voices by reminding and encouraging all voices to be shared in order to make the FS as productive a meeting as possible.

Language needs to be adapted. It can frequently be viewed as imperialistic sounding. Sometimes it may be important to work with the FS process without naming it. "Future search" can be a very charged term in some languages/cultures.

Especially in former non-transparent societies, people generally don't show initiative and still live with the fear of speaking up. When inviting potential participants, it is particularly important to consider *what* is being asked, *who* is doing the asking, and *how* the question is being asked.

Practical examples were given that stressed the strategy of taking away what is potentially threatening (to the planning phase):

- Getting the participants to believe that change is possible
- Meeting on neutral territory
- Ownership of the questions to be asked
- Structure is necessary
- Giving space to communicate feelings (which is highly unusual in some cultures)

Trust building is very important.

This was perhaps the most important insight that surfaced relative to using FS in these types of societies. Planning, preparation, and more planning are perhaps needed at a higher quantity and level than in some other societies. The pre-FS (planning) timeline may need to shift in order to build a certain level of trust and to model what you are saying in terms of the authenticity that is required for a successful FS. More time may need to be devoted to pre-planning stages in order to obtain a level of the comfort, openness, and collaboration that is often arrived at much sooner when working with other groups. A recommendation may be to think of a pre-FS training for the planning committee in how to plan and work together.

The best practice may be to find an ally and prep someone from within to create the safe place for FS. There is usually more distrust than usual of an outsider.

Though it may be obvious, it is always good to remember the need for extreme, heightened cultural awareness.

Finally, don't give up! The world is changing rapidly and slowly all at once. FS has the potential to change the world one meeting at a time, but in some of the (previously) more closed societies of the world, it just may take more nurturing and preparation to get, as Marv and Sandra say, "to the next step." FS

A Greater New York City Update

Yuval Dror and the GNY Future Searchers

I moved to New York City a year ago. As a new FSN member, I thought NYC would be a great place for using future search: it is fast, huge, and eager for results—everything that a FS can deliver. Unfortunately, and to my surprise, I could find no FS traces in the Big Apple. I wondered why.

After settling down, I tried to network. I met with Rick Lent in Boston and I found some names on the website. And, with the help of the people in Philadelphia, I managed to develop a small list of people. We had our first meeting half a year ago, and since then we've had one almost every month.

First was the enthusiasm of getting to know each other. Some of us had previous relationships, but most of us not. And not everyone could show up for every meeting. It is my feeling now that the eight of us who are “permanent” participants have left behind the first phase of “getting to know each other” at every meeting opening (though always we have one newcomer; once it was a visitor from Mexico, another time it was Sandra and Marv on the phone). So we now do a short version of introducing ourselves.

We spent two or three meetings, usually three hours in the middle of a working day, to figure out why we should meet and what we are looking for. We stated our mission:

To create a future search presence in the greater NY area through

our continued meetings and through collective marketing/PR efforts. To create and maintain a learning community for OD, facilitation, conflict resolution, training, and any other human potential development areas, based on FS principles and practice, and bringing in other knowledge and resources as appropriate.

There was an agreement that our gathering should have professional outcomes as well as business ones. *The task of the group is helping us be better professionals and have more paid projects, not forgetting one of the FS network concepts that no conference will not run because of a budget problem within the client organization.*

marketing or selling FS but about *helping clients to buy*. We got this message through discussion with Marv and Sandra and from approaching the listserve to get

**Using FS *Principles* in a Non-FS Consultation,” #29, August 2004. —Ed.

We think that our gathering is based on a common belief in FS principles. Many of us think that those principles and values can be applied to our work even if we are not exactly rolling out a FS conference. (Shem Cohen, one of our most devoted members, although coming from Albany, wrote an article on this in the last *Future Searching**)

Another thing we have in common is that we share a passion for spreading FS availability in our region. As a result of these two commitments, we usually split our meetings in two—one for professional discussion and one for business discussion.

What We Have Accomplished Thus Far

We have a sound idea about marketing: we no longer think about

some fresh ideas from all of you. We accepted Marvin's idea that: “One cannot sell it; someone has to buy it.”

Other influencing ideas:

- A common aspect of stories about how conferences were initiated is that an insider (familiar with FS) was doing the buy-in and/or becoming the sponsor of an event. We need to have ways to help “them” to find “us.” If we want to increase the chances of conducting an FS, we need to be more visible in the region, by having a website or other indirect marketing.
 - A continuous thread of thought was that we have to take a deep breath and think in a long-term vision, because we have to educate New Yorkers about these concepts and ideas, which are not natural to the culture of doing business in New York.
 - The main idea of approaching future clients is focusing on problems and ways of solving them. As Sandra said: “Forget about future search.” The logic is: What are the results you are looking for? What are the product-able outcomes? How might you find common ground for the topic you struggle with? What are the differences between tools you might use to reach actionable outcomes (Open Space vs. FS, for example)? How are you going to have alignment and energy for your action points? And only then, limitations of time and resources.
- As a result, Anne and Shem planned an orientation meeting, which was delivered by Yuval and Anne. (Shem was injured while building his *succah*, so we had a last-minute change of horses.) Only five people showed up, but it was our first experience, which we are going to talk about at our next meeting.

The orientation meeting was based on Kenoli's generic plan. We found that the most important aspects of the introduction were working on task selection—especially on phrasing it—and on building the participant list. The feedback we got from the listeners was that these two, together with the video (we used the Hoopono Koolau Loa one, although not without hesitation, because we were not sure it is the best for that audience), were most helpful for them to get the message. We also developed a generic set of slides.

We are also in the midst of tracing members of our network who have been affiliated with FSN or taken the training at some point in recent years, to try to revitalize at least those who are working in organizations (we believe that all of the external consultants are already with us), so if this update reaches someone we are not aware of, you are most welcome to join! This is because our understanding is that those insiders with experience and knowledge about FS are the most important for building our presence in the region.

After establishing this list, our plan is to:

- Contact FS-trained internal consultants for personal contact and small-group meetings: we want to know how FS was used within their organizations and how it might be of value now or in the future.
- Bring in clients of FS to give us an overview of what the process was like for them as a client.
- Look into the possibilities of doing orientation sessions in universities, businesses, and nonprofit organizations.
- Identify conflict areas in NY that might use FS to help them move forward.

In the professional agenda, we had a journal club type of dialogue, based on Shem's article. It was the sense of the group that it was very constructive to use such an article as a springboard for our conversation. In reflecting on our process, we also established the following guidelines for future discussions:

- Start by focusing our topic: What do we mean by X?
- Begin with a moment of silence. Be attentive to the energy and

focus with which we begin to speak.

- Be conscious of our "speed." Stay thoughtful at intersections when one speaker ends and another begins. Listen.
- Stay with our own direct experience.
- Facilitation: maybe using FS self-management concept?

We developed some thoughts regarding what we'll do between meetings. Sometimes people took responsibility to do or to write something on behalf of the group, such as approaching the listserv with a question, summarizing the meeting, or preparing for the next meeting. So, in a way, the group is still in the first step of developing its mode of working together.

There was an agreement that our gathering should have professional outcomes as well as business ones. *The task of the group is helping us be better professionals and have more paid projects*, not forgetting one of the FS network concepts that no conference will not run because of a budget problem within the client organization. **FS**

FSN in Greater Washington DC Area (FSN-GWA)

Mary Broad

I am pleased to report that there is a bit of action in the Washington DC area. Early this year, a recent graduate of Marv and Sandra's FS course, Bill Hancy, contacted the FSN listserv with a request for assistance in finding a way to offer FS facilitation assistance to some part of the Baltimore public school system, primarily to support improvement for children's futures.

Over the course of the following eight months, local FSN members or allies joined Bill's team: Ed Bon-tempo, George Reed, Malethia Armstrong (with strong ties to the Baltimore school system), Jessica

Bearman, Karyn Trader-Leigh, and I. Ed and Malethia, colleagues in the past, worked together in meeting with potential decision makers within and outside the school system, with support from the rest of us.

Consequently, a FS is now planned for December of this year. Our team is meeting for an intense planning session tomorrow morning, and will hold an opening session with the Planning Committee for the future search next week.

This is the first live prospect we have found in several years, and we are delighted that Bill provided the

impetus and start-up energy. We will keep you posted on how this works out.

Meanwhile, I want to see whether we can find some potential nonprofit clients. Early this year, our local FSN-GWA group joined the Maryland Association of Nonprofit Organizations for the low membership fee of \$100 annually (since we have no real budget of our own!). We haven't geared up yet to market our services to the thousands of members throughout the state, and I hope we can begin that effort soon. **FS**

Reenergizing the Youth Council in NW Missouri

Sandy Silva

Everyone!

I want to share an immediate, short version of yet another huge and fun success for future search. The Missouri Division of Workforce Development sponsored a future search on June 28-30, 2004, to re-invent and re-energize the Youth Council in Northwest Missouri. Great—but, what the heck does that mean, and what happened?

In 18 counties of northwest Missouri, Workforce Investment Boards, through the Youth Council, guide the services provided to youth who have identified barriers to successfully participating in the workforce. This conference was about bringing together all the stakeholders who create, guide, contract, and administer these programs, as well as youth, parents, etc., etc. You get it—the whole system in the room!

It was great! We had a tremendous team. Paul Hedlund and I were the co-facilitators. The “inside guy” was Gail Ledesma, who suggested the use of a future search to her boss in January 2004. Having an experienced facilitator working inside the organization was a dream

One More Time!

I was chagrined to see that Vera Jashni's name was not included in the chapter authors list for the upcoming book on *Leading Systemic School Improvement*. She was my co-author, brainstorming the ideas, editing the first draft, and then doing the difficult work of the final cutting that we had not expected.

—Jean Katz

come true. Another plus was identifying funds in the budget to cover the expenses of Sage Hayes, a FS facilitator who volunteered her time to come in from Maine to document the conference. Sage has worked for 10 years with youth in Maine, so her professional expertise and her experience with the methodology were contributions well beyond her role as documenter.

Some High Points

After the creative future scenarios had been presented, we had a request from the participants for Gail, Paul, Sage, and Sandy to “do a skit” for the group. Paul had brought his whole techno setup with him and had been taking digital pictures all along. So we opened the last day with the four of us attending the Future Search Learning Exchange held in St. Joseph, Missouri, on June 30, 2004! We chatted about all we had done since that great FS 10 years ago, as well as what we knew the youth had accomplished, e.g., “Yeah;

I was talking to Dr. Butler—she *did* go to medical school!” We explained that the Learning Exchange was being held in St. Joseph, Missouri (not Stockholm, Ireland, or San Francisco), because 10 years ago all the work done there had become a model for youth-focused future searches. We started to reminisce about some of the ideas of the future search, and we slipped into a pictorial slide show of the last couple of (real) days to the theme


from Rocky and a Sting tune. The participants loved it. It was a great reminder for them of all the work they had done.

The critical actions step produced four committed working groups who formed around identified common ground areas. The big surprise was a “new group” composed of five young people. They opened their presentation (which “coincidentally” was the last presentation) with their own theme: “No Group

Can Stand Alone.” They explained to all of us that every time we split up into groups, we create more and more separation and division and we lose the power of the whole. Part of their presentation was to offer the creation of a Web location that would represent an area for each one of the “figurehead groups” as well as chat capability. They said it would be up and running in two days and encouraged everyone to visit on a daily basis to see what was going on with everyone!

Our report will be on the site ASAP. There were

funds built into the budget for “follow-up,” so there is already a Ripple Project about to happen. Each one of us on the team has our individual lessons learned, and we’ve had discussions about initiating listserve discussions, etc., etc. So... more to come.

The Team: Sage Hayes
Paul Hedlund
Gail Ledesma
Sandy Silva 

This conference was about bringing together all the stakeholders who create, guide, contract, and administer these programs, as well as youth, parents, etc., etc. You get it—the whole system in the room!

FS “Alive and Well in Montana”

Mary Jane Standaert (with Libby Hancock and Kirk Astroth)

In April 2000, the Early Childhood Leadership in Montana hosted a Montana Early Childhood future search. Susan Rohrbough from Ohio was hired to facilitate our event because she had experience with future search and was connected to one of the Montana planners through Head Start. She requested that two people be chosen to help her facilitate; they would subsequently be trained in the process and could help with follow-up. Those two people were Kirk Astroth from Montana State University Extension and 4-H and Libby Hancock from the Early Childhood Project. That was a very successful experience, with all planned outcomes being achieved in the years following.

In 2003, Kirk asked Libby and me to facilitate a Montana 4-H future search to be held in April 2004. Libby and I had facilitated eight community future searches as follow-up from the previous state-wide event, so we felt fairly confident that we could do the work and curious about working with an entirely different group—not our usual early childhood, education, and human service population.

The 4-H future search took place at a remarkably beautiful place in Red Lodge, Montana, with adults and youth from the various perspectives of 4-H youth development work. Stakeholders who participated included 4-H youth; 4-H adult volunteers, donors, and alumni; local elected officials and policy makers; 4-H Center for Youth Development staff; county extension agents; educators and campus faculty; tribal extension staff; communications and media representatives; commodity groups; fair boards; and other special-interest group representatives.

“Trust the Process”

All parts of the future search went well, but on the second day and the

morning of the third day, people kept asking, “When do we get to the plan?” “How do we know what we will be working on?” We calmly asked them to trust the process. Then, “like magic,” all the issues, all the strengths and creative ideas came together in a workable and acceptable plan. Everyone left with tasks to accomplish.

This was very rewarding to us as facilitators, because this was a diverse group of Montanans from a completely different type of organization from our previous experiences. The youth involvement, both high school and college age, added a great deal of fresh thinking, energy, and humor. We all were thrilled to witness the depth of their engagement in the process, willingness to actively participate, level of commitment to 4-H, and strong leadership qualities. It certainly demonstrated to us the benefits of 4-H involvement to youth in Montana!

The specific plan that was agreed upon is, of course, important to the Montana 4-H people, but the process that brought this diverse group of people to agreement is of unique importance because it worked; and it worked with a multi-generational group. Through this process, we all came to realize two things: First, youth are certainly capable of coming up with their own ideas, defining the problems they want to address, and determining how they want to do so. Second, youth involvement can lead to imaginative, insightful, and practical approaches that redefine how organizations look at young people. Through the process of future search, young people are actively engaged in transforming the future and thereby becoming healthy, contributing, and productive citizens of both the present and the future.

Just wanted to let you know the future search process is alive and well in Montana. **FS**

Time to Change from FSN to IFSN?

It's clear now that, almost overnight it seems, Future Search Network has become a truly *international* organization. If anyone doubts it, there's much more evidence of this than just the fact that our past Learning Exchange was in Sweden and the next one will be in Northern Ireland.

Just peruse this issue of *FutureSearching*:

Almost half of the more than 60 new FSN members (p. 5) are from outside the U.S. —Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. (And, of course, we have members from more countries than just those.)

Two reports in this issue refer to future searches in Malawi and Yemen (pp. 1 & 8). Another describes bringing in much of the world as the “whole system,” with “the room” being in Bangkok (p. 1). A discussion group from the May Learning Exchange focused on using future search in transitional, “struggling” societies all over the world (p. 23).

In addition to reports from local/regional groups in this country (Washington, D.C., and New York City), there are reports from the Netherlands and Nepal.

Finally, six of the 10 workshops listed in the FSN calendar (p. 28) are scheduled for Australia, India, Austria, and South Africa.

So now I think of us as the *International* Future Search Network. And I'll bet you do, too, wherever you are!

— Larry Porter, *Editor*

FSN Calendar

Deadline for submissions to *FutureSearching* #31 (April 2005) is March 1, 2005. Please e-mail all submissions to Larry Porter.

Managing a Future Search: A Learning Workshop

January 30-February 2, 2005

Ballarat, Australia
Contact Bob O'Shea,
b.oshea@ballarat.edu.au

February 7-9, 2005

Bangalore, India
Contact Aruna Gopakumar,
aruna@navgati-india.com

March 29-April 1, 2005

Bryn Mawr, PA
Contact Sally Theilacker,
fsn@futuresearch.net
Phone 800.951.6333,
215.951.0328, or Fax 215.849.7360

June 14-17, 2005

Vienna, Austria
Contact Hermine Steinbach-Buchinger,
office@agentursteinbach.at

October 16-19, 2005

Mohonk Mountain House
New Paltz, NY
Contact Sally Theilacker

January 2006

South Africa
Contact John Goss, jgoss@iafrica.com

Facilitating the Whole System in the Room

January 27-29, 2005

Ballarat, Australia
Contact Bob O'Shea,
b.oshea@ballarat.edu.au

May 22-24, 2005

Bryn Mawr, PA
Contact Sally Theilacker

November 6-8, 2005

Bryn Mawr, PA
Contact Sally Theilacker

January 2006

South Africa
Contact John Goss, jgoss@iafrica.com

Learning Exchange

June 9-11, 2005

Northern Ireland
Contact Sally Theilacker

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