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The Search Conference

Design and Management of Learning

with a Solution to the "Pairing Puzzle"[1]

Within the Search Conference, a system searches for the most adaptive relationship between itself and its environment. It is a method for *ecological adaptation*. Arising from the concept of an open system, the Search Conference fits within the world hypothesis of *contextualism*, accepting change as a given (Pepper, 1942/1970:234-35).

Planning within the Type IV environment with its discontinuities and relevant uncertainties requires active adaptation (Emery and Trist, 1965/Vol.III) continuous maneuvering as in the Strategy of the Indirect Approach (Sun Tzu, 1943; Hart, 1943, 1946). It also requires an adaptive organizational form. As a temporary organization, the Search Conference is structured on the second organizational design principle--redundancy of function (Emery, F., Vol.II:214-53). It is, therefore, a purposeful organization, a structure for learning and the emergence of ideal-seeking (Emery, F., Vol.III).

Participants are selected from the system whose future is the purpose of the Search Conference *not* as representatives but as individuals with a piece of knowledge of the system which is a piece of the puzzle which is their future. Using this pool of knowledge, extracted directly from their experience and environment (Emery, F., Vol.III) participants learn to solve this puzzle, "learning to learn." As they conduct their large group conversation towards the task, they become a creative learning planning community, accepting responsibility for the content and outcome.

The practice of naive realism by a group as it plans its most

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[1]A new paper.

desirable future leads to greater confidence in perception and to creativity. When the focus of this activity includes the extended social field, the combined power of the second design principle and ecological learning is multiplied as they perceive and use the adaptive relations between their capabilities and the changing nature of the field in which they are embedded.

The essential feature of design and management is that the learning planning community is enabled to continue taking responsibility for its own future. It contributes to learning about and action towards participative democracy.

The Design of the Learning Environment and Process

A Search is a carefully designed integration of external and internal structure and process which functions to provide an environment for the practice of Paradigm 2 learning. Each of the major theoretical frameworks is translated into practice and integrated with other bodies of conceptual knowledge to form an internally consistent whole. The essence of external structure is as follows.

External Structure or Design

External structure is essentially the translation of the concept of open systems into the design of a Search Conference. The basic classical design is shown in Figure 1. Usually, the L_{22}, data collection about its current nature and its analysis and synthesis into Desirable and Probable Futures is Phase 1. Phase 2 follows with the analysis and synthesis of the L_{11}, consisting of a history session, an analysis of the system today and a construction of the Desirable System. Phase 3 integrates the learning from Phases 1 and 2. The *content*, therefore, derives from the nature of environment and system. The *process* is integrated puzzle learning (L_{21}) and

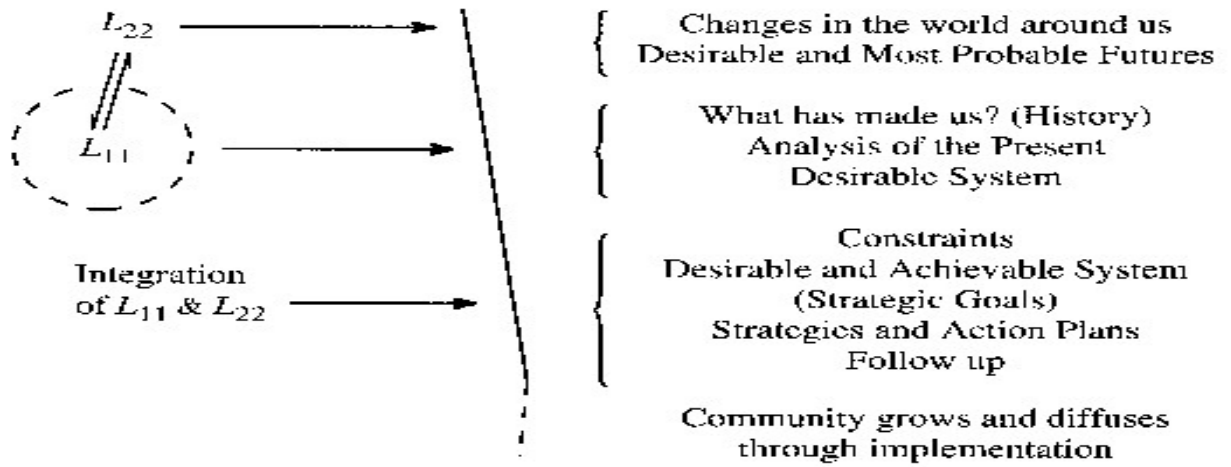


Figure 1. The open system translated into the search conference.

active adaptive planning (L_{12}).

The external structure shown in Figure 1 is schematic and each Search Conference is essentially custom designed, elaborated from the above irreducible minimum. For example, for greenfield sites and where the Search is being used to bring into being a new organization or network, there are no history or system analysis sessions because there is no system. There may, however, be examples of previously failed efforts and it may be worth spending some time on these in order to learn from the history of others.

The sequence of these components through which the community should attempt the task is not immutable and it will be elaborated in various ways depending on the nature and circumstances of the system and the purpose of the Search Conference. In some form it will encompass elements of learning about:

- the extended social field (L_{22})
- expression of ideals (desirable futures)
- organization, community or network character distilled from history; and present character and distinctive competence

(probability of choice) analyzed and reviewed in the light of our desirable future (L_{11})

- what we must take into account in our strategic planning such as constraints and opportunities drawn particularly from both the most probable future and the L_{11} analysis

- the strategy of the Indirect Approach and, finally,

- how do we organize ourselves so that the plan is implemented consistently with our purposes?

The Search Conference derives its effectiveness from the inclusion of each of the key components and concepts expressed in ways appropriate for the system which is its focus. Therefore we find designs which differ quite markedly from the classical abstract design above.

In corporate, industry and issue Searches, another level of environment may need to be included. This is the *task environment* (Williams, 1982) which lies between the L_{22} and the L_{11} (Figure 2).

For the Canning Peach Industry in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA) (Figure 3) much time was devoted to this task environment. It was felt beforehand that the industry nationally was particularly idiosyncratic and that its future in the MIA would depend on high levels of understanding of all factors and their interdependencies. After determining the essential characteristics of the industry the next session was an integration of desirable and undesirable characteristics and constraints. The desirable future industry was left till later. This illustrates that in highly complex situations much time is needed to guarantee that there is a shared knowledge

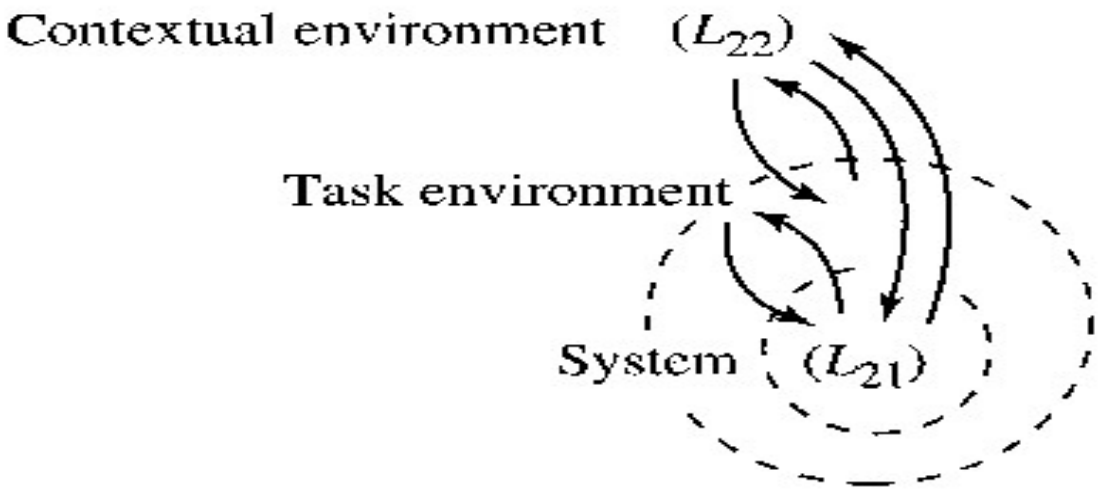


Figure 2. Relation of task environment to L_{22} and L_{11}.

of the *whole*

system and in this industry 25 quite separate features were isolated

There are other cases in which there are clearly two relevant task environments and this raises serious debates about what can best be accomplished in a Search Conference or through other means; and the necessity for trade-offs between adequacy of design and the time and human resources required to work through it.

The design is a plan, not a program, and it is impossible beforehand to do other than notionally time the phases. The community may return to earlier phases if it is perceived that they need more work and designs are sometimes changed during the Search Conference. Designing and managing on the run is perhaps the greatest test of a designer and manager's skills and it is here that conceptual knowledge really pays off. Without it,

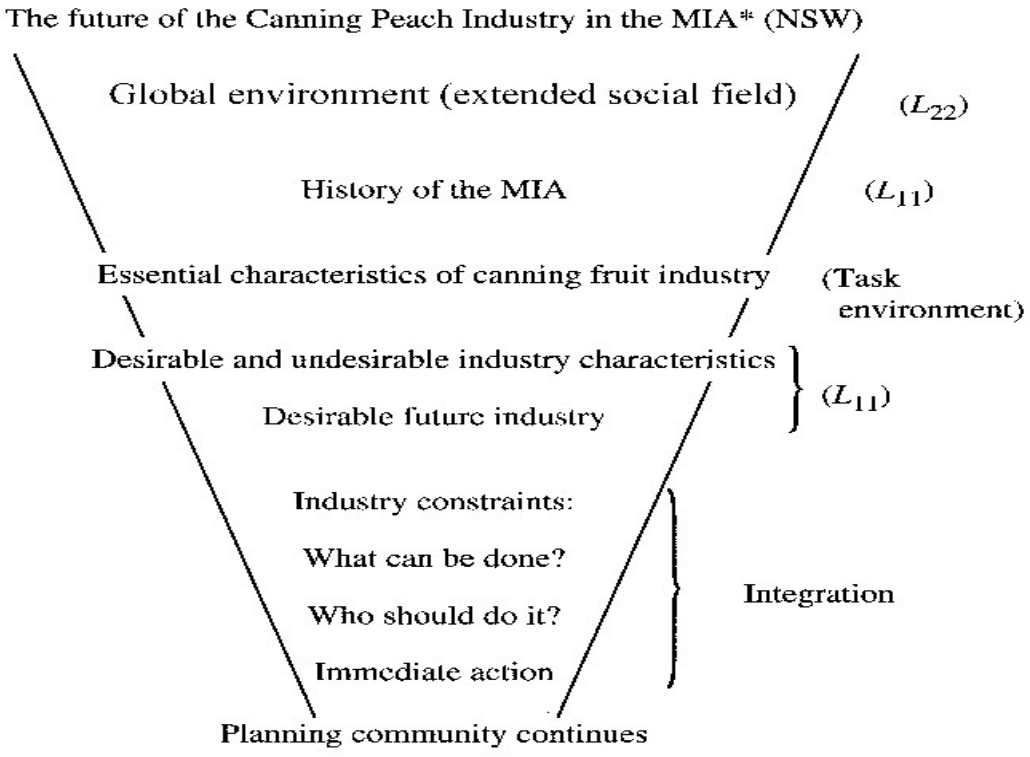


Fig 3 Strategic Planning at the Industrial level

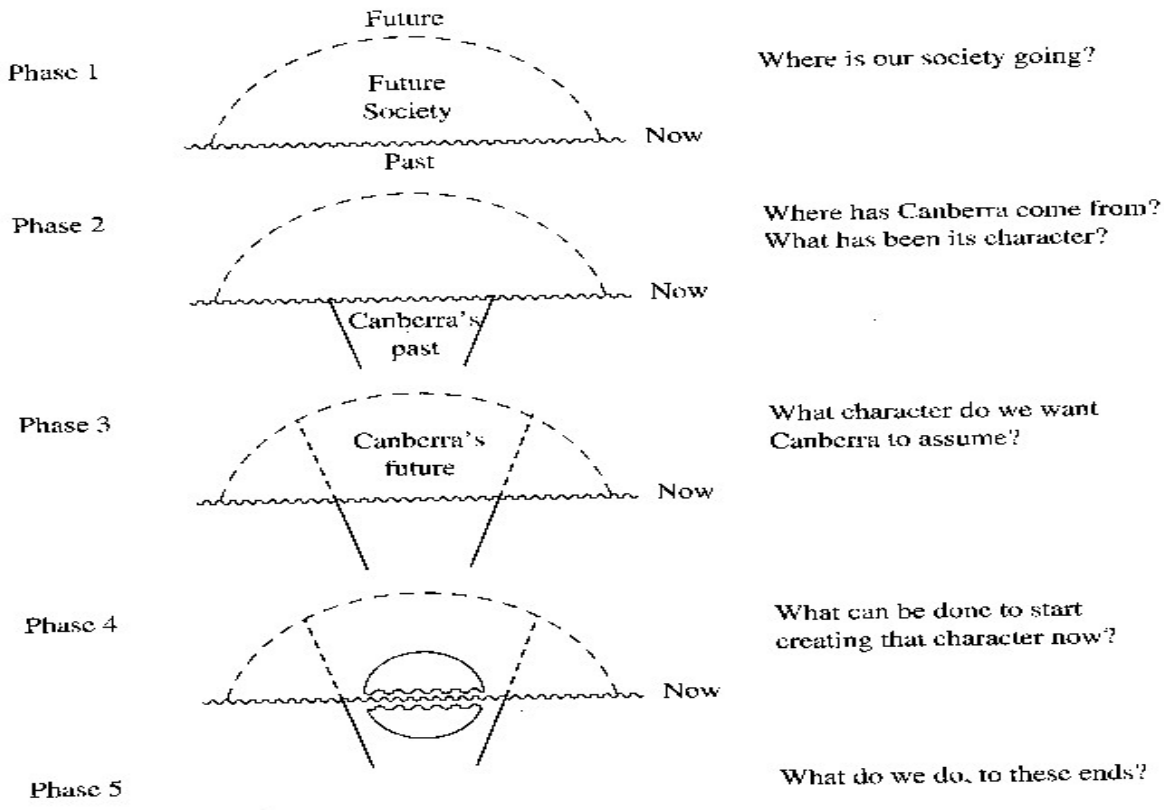


Fig 4 Dynamics of External Structure

a manager, by dipping into his or her tool kit, may introduce a Design Principle 1 or a non-task-oriented element which cuts across the task and its momentum, jeopardizing the success of the event.

Figure 4, using the example of the future of Canberra, illustrates the dynamics of external design and the essential character of the Search Conference as it begins at the widest point--that most open to possibilities and to ideals (Phase 1), introduces the past (Phase 2) and builds upon this ensuring the continuity of past into future (Phase 3). In Phase 4 a new community has developed (the Search Conference community) which has accepted the responsibility of securing their most desirable city. Phase 5 covers decisions about the most effective future courses of action.

Internal Structure

A Search Conference is designed to bring into being learning planning communities. The internal structure is designed to do precisely this and managerial behavior must in every way be congruent with this outcome. The more competently and responsibly the managers work with the whole community in terms of juggling time and tasks, using a low key approach in establishing the conditions for effective communication, and thus the creative working mode (see below), the greater will be the learning and the higher will be the quality of the plans. A vision of something different and democratic is necessary but not sufficient. Unless the vision is accompanied by conceptual knowledge of practical moves towards a participative democracy there will inevitably be casualties of all types--the result of lack of concepts, rules and "know-how." The absence of these properties can lead to the condition of laissez-faire, not democracy. Or it can lead to spectacular or desultory failures, and it can give the Search Conference a bad name.

While the critical relationship within the external structure is that of *participants-task*, the internal structure revolves around the intramanagerial and *management-participant* relationship where there is more than one manager (and this is desirable). The nature of the intramanagerial relationship must mirror precisely the desired nature of the community. That is, management must share responsibility for the conference as a whole. Management-participant relations must not be allowed to fall into a one-to-one pattern. The single fact that individual managers become identified with individual groups within the community is often sufficient to account for various shortcomings in a conference.

Figure 5 illustrates the divergent models A and C. There is also an intermediate and less than ideal model--B. The Figure illustrates topologically the sequences of figure-ground relationship that operate in an effective community-building Search (C) or a traditional academic or group-

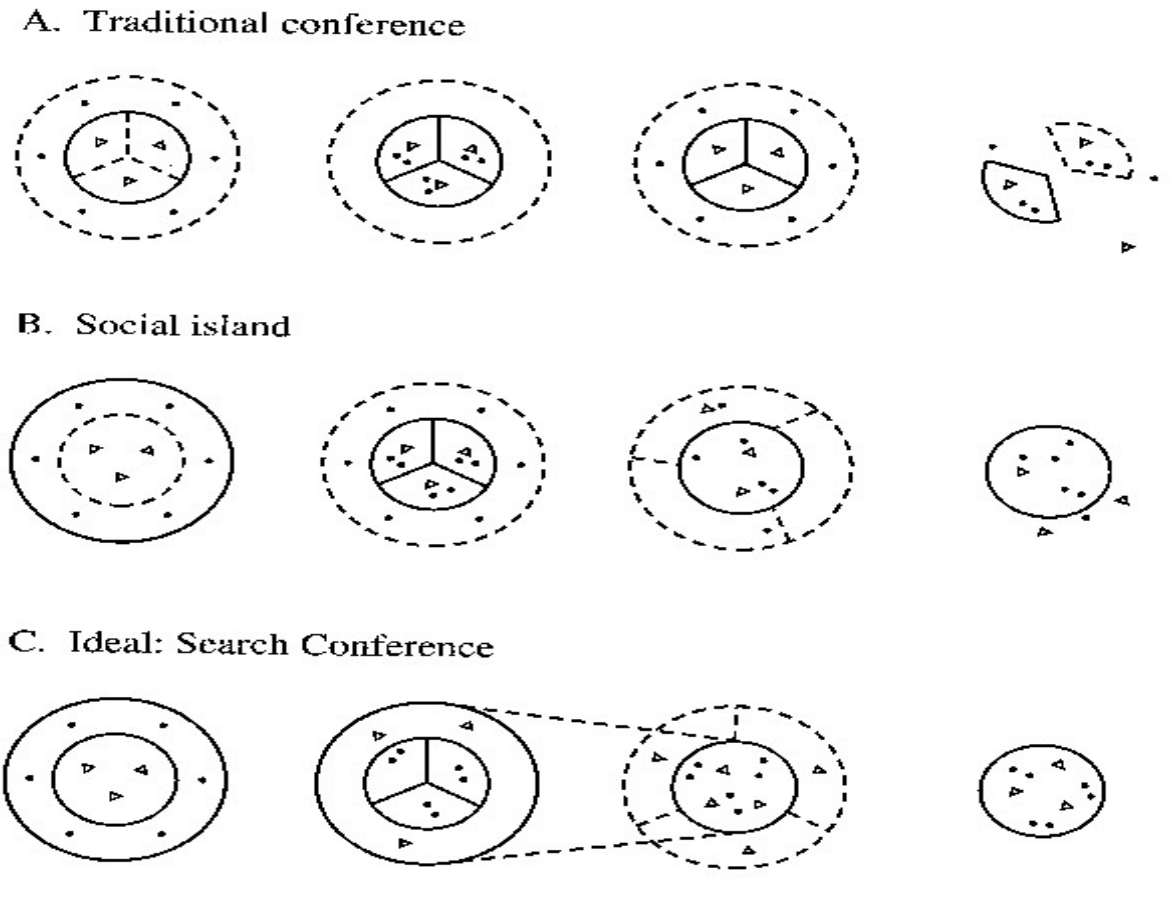


Fig 5 Internal structures over time

building conference (A). The models may be read as sequences in themselves or each may be compared at any point in time to provide an analysis of the effects of different initial and subsequent structures.

The traditional academic conference (A) has a particular purpose and ethic derived from Design Principle 1, endemic in universities. As stated above, such conferences are not designed for learning. They arose for the purpose of transmitting information from the experts to the rest (Educational Paradigm 1) and as such are performance- rather than task-oriented.

Conferences which attempt to be problem- or puzzle-solving, yet

use a traditional academic format, inevitably result in frustrations and disappointment at consequent inaction. The large international conferences such as World Food and the Women's conference in Mexico, are good examples of these disappointments, despite the huge financial and human resources which were poured into their preparation and "staging."

In the traditional conference the initial conditions at t_o involve the *staff* and speakers as figures against the ground of the task of community-building. It is staff input or action that provides the focus, data and direction for subsequent process. Participants relate to or contribute to the task only indirectly, if at all. In the Search Conference, because it is a pure Design Principle 2 event, there is a division of labor between *managers* and participants such that the participants are responsible for the content and the outcome and the managers are responsible for the learning environments and process. Therefore, at t_0 the figural properties attach to the task. They act with shared responsibility and without emphasis on individual specializations in their attempt to minimize the distance between themselves and participants.

At t_1 in the academic, Design Principle 1, structure, the conference may break into groups with their own leaders or "facilitators" and the work of these groups continues to be figural not only against the background of the averred task of the community but also against that of other groups. The conference has failed to come together as a community itself by the final sessions t_2 where the distinction between staff and participants remains as strong as at t_0 but with the added disadvantage that the boundaries between staff as individuals and with special areas and functions have been strengthened. Any end product of such a structure must inevitably be merely an aggregate or sum of the individual group results rather than an example of the "productive thinking" of a community (Wertheimer, 1945). Because the task of building a cohesive community was never the figure, it does not eventuate at t_3.

In distinction to A, Model C at t_1 continues with the management

concerned with the figural properties of the community and acting as a resource to the community whose working groups have the figural properties. By building-in this dual level message through structure, the final sessions, t_2 in this model, show implicitly and explicitly that learning about building communities is generated through the experience of building communities. Participants and managers as a new community recognize this new entity and the role of the working groups is appreciated as an instrumental condition only--internal scaffolding. These dynamics are essential for diffusive learning.

Model B represents a transitional or immature form of the Search Conference. While its structure at t_1 reverts to the predominance of group work over community generation, such factors as extreme social island conditions, accepting community responsibility for some domestic tasks and the meaningfulness of the task may be sufficient to reinstate the community as the dominant and continuing figure. It is obvious from the models that A operates with competition, C with cooperation--a community. Thus the basic design fault in Model B is built in at t_1. When the responsibility for a meaningful task is handed to a large group, its members cope effectively with the task and their own internal dynamics. There are resources hidden in groups that will be fully realized only under conditions of responsible self-management. The learning that occurs in the self-managing task-oriented groups can be fast and deep. It is simply not necessary--let alone desirable--for managers to be present during small group work apart from brief visits for maintaining time and progress towards task. This is the most common mistake made by inexperienced or anxious managers.

It can be seen that internal structure exerts a powerful and pervasive influence. Model A can produce tension and unease in a staff group who have come together with the best intentions of cooperation and with experience of having worked together before. It can prejudice any serious attempt at building cohesive communities or producing constructive work during plenary sessions.

Within the traditional mode, staff are usually chosen because it

is believed that they have greater experience and understanding of the task than participants. They are experts in the content. The role of management in Model C is to

- fully understand the theoretical framework and concepts underlying the Search Conference and to have some experience in operationalizing these.

- stay within the limits of their role as designers and managers leaving responsibility for content and outcome to those who have to live with the consequences.

In practice, this means that they

- explain the overall plan and set clear, precisely defined tasks for each phase.

- decide which tasks and subtasks are to be small group or community (plenary) work.

- manage all plenary sessions towards the integration of work into a community product using the rationalization of conflict model.

- manage time.

- monitor but not intervene in small group work.

- deal with outbreaks of Bion's (1952) dynamics, if they occur, in such a way as to bring the community back to the creative working mode (see below).

- observe the four conditions for effective communication (see below) and, in particular, practice openness.

- are totally task-oriented with a light, positive approach. Diffusion is a function of the energy generated by the positive affects of excitement and joy (Emery, M., 1986).

Managing the Learning Process

There are two other major bodies of knowledge involved in the practice of developing active adaptive learning planning communities. These are the conditions for effective (influential) communication and Bion's group dynamics. Search Conferences are designed and managed to prevent the basic group assumptions which inhibit learning, and to produce the Creative Working Mode (*W*).

Managing the Conditions for Influential (Effective) Communication

The open systems framework, Design Principle 2, and use of ecological learning create a powerful environment for responsible, creative work. Within that environment it is possible to deliberately create the conditions for influential, i.e., effective, communication.

Asch's (1952) statement of these conditions gives us a detailed set of criteria for judging whether a group is in the Creative Working Mode (*W*). Furthermore, it gives us guidelines for detecting circumstances or behaviors that will lead to resistance to learning. Anything that contravenes these four conditions can disturb the group conversation and initiate an outbreak of the basic group assumptions. As *conversation* is the structured vehicle for organized thought, learning and preparation for concerted action (de Laguna, 1927, 1963:xi-xii), the function of management is to prevent and personally avoid disturbance of it.

Asch's conditions apply to designing face-to-face environments from the model in which two people (A and B) enter into a relationship with respect to some object or behavior (X) in which they share an interest. Learning leading to adoption of innovation depends on these basic conditions or properties which are forces on communication. They are by their very nature "universal, tacit and compelling" (Emery and Emery, 1976:20). The Search Conference managers' task is to create and maintain these conditions. This core set of conditions comprises openness in all things, establishing that all participants share a common humanity, share an objective world and can trust each other to responsibly contribute to the community task.

1. Openness

The presence of an objectively ordered field open to the inspection of all. Participants have to know that they are in a situation which is totally open to their investigation and that things are "what they appear to be." We must therefore attempt to design environments where exploration and checking out are highly valued and where it is assumed that differences in perception and opinion will exist. Any challenge to the validity of naive realism will lead to loss of self-confidence and a decline in mutual support and respect. It will inhibit understanding and potential diffusion. Thus, we encourage the view that it is healthy and creative to acknowledge such differences and that mutual learning will follow from the sharing of various direct experiences and perceptions. This is, of course, a necessary precondition for the rationalization of conflict and the establishment of common ground.

Component features of our designs to maximize such openness include participatory prebriefing on process, rationale, role of observers, experts, etc. Wherever possible, the planning for an event must be itself participatory. *Our* roles, values, expectations, underlying strategy and long-term goals are, to the maximum extent possible in any given situation, put up

for inspection and clarified before work proper begins. Efforts are consciously made to ensure that any concepts used come across in a variety of media--visual as well as verbal--and in the vernacular, so that we come across clearly as people as open to inspection as are the concepts themselves. Our message has to be, to a large extent, our medium. Such efforts towards openness go a long way to meeting Bok's (1978/1989) plea for a return to an ethical Social Science.

Perhaps the most striking innovation towards openness which is now taken entirely for granted was the use of butchers' paper to compile an immediate, accessible and continuous record of work performed. These flipcharts paper the walls of the conference room for the duration, turning the room into a temporary home. As a legible instantaneous record taken in full view of all present, these pieces of paper provide the ultimate seal and guarantee of openness and absence of manipulation of ends by ourselves or any cliques within the total body of a meeting. It is virtually impossible to change the results on butchers' paper without detection!

2. Basic Psychological Similarity: We are All Human with the Same Human Concerns

It is the actual behavior of people that best conveys this ultimate similarity. Once behaviors and motives can be seen to be similar or congruous with one's own, it becomes possible for people to admit that they can learn something from others. When, however, there is a perception of contempt or condescension on the part of one towards the other, the probability of effective communication declines rapidly. Any perception of a manager or participant acting as "expert," "talking down" or displaying arrogant behavior will restrict the effectiveness of the mutual learning taking place. We need to establish that each individual is an action center in the total environment and that collective learning and planning around agreed purposes does attest to a common humanity and will, thereby, further

those purposes.

Apart from point *1* above, where we encourage confidence in the validity of the individual perception and value stance, we attempt to design the overall process and manage it such that the prevailing psychodynamics favor cooperation and creative work and learning. We have found that most people do, in fact, seek confirmation of their basic psychological similarity and early on in a Search welcome the chance to put together their *most desirable future.* This task

- at the most practical level serves to outline the direction in which any future action will proceed.

- by allowing people an opportunity to share with others their basic *ideals* and hopes, it makes them visible and real.

It also almost inevitably confirms that

- there is an underlying level of concern with humanity and the state of the world and that the usually unspoken presence of human ideals is no respecter of gender, age, race, status or age.

- by discussing and deciding upon such matters as a desirable future in either global or national terms, a modus vivendi for working together has been established--a benchmark for the possibility of more creative cooperative work towards joint purposes.

Right from the first session, this and following benchmarks are firmly established by the "rationalization of conflict" (Emery, M., 1993:251-53). This is the process that establishes exactly what is agreed (the common ground) and what is disagreed. This process cannot be instituted without integration of group reports. Integration of group reports is essential at

every stage of the Search. Without it, there is no community-agreed product or sense of community-building. The event remains at the immature stage as in Model B of internal structure, above.

Use of the "rationalization of conflict" also provides learning and reassurance for those who believe that all "process conferences" must experience the basic assumptions of fight/flight. This is a very dangerous belief, particularly in a manager, as it can be self-fulfilling. In Models A and B above where there is no integration and community-building, flight/flight is a constant danger. An outbreak in a Search Conference can be brought under control by an experienced manager but it costs in terms of basic psychological similarity and slows down the emergence of trust.

3. Emergence of a Mutually Shared Field: We All Live in the Same World.

This process consists essentially of establishing that the environment has features which are commonly perceived, that is, are objective and form a shared context for planning and action. From this context arise ordered intentional interactions such that signals of intention from one are registered and taken into account by the other when considering courses of action. For joint decision-making this context, together with the expression of ideals, becomes a shared point of reference whereby people establish interlocking directive correlations--the necessary infrastructure for continuing joint purposeful action.

To this end we have developed simple procedures for mapping the extended field of directive correlations such that the final aggregate includes the widest diversity of individual perceptions of movement and change in that field. Without prejudice and fear of contradiction, people register, on the butchers' paper, their observations of change occurring in this field. This list then becomes the fundamental data available for analysis and then synthesis into desirable or probable futures. The data and scenarios

remain in full view to function as check points and reality tests for any subsequent proposals or plans. Accessible to all and manipulable by none, this snapshot of the L_{22} serves amongst other purposes that of establishing the validity of the notion that *we all live in the same world*. In this way--and having also in the process established some of the conventions of democratic function and Paradigm 2 learning--the community can more easily begin to question their own hidden assumptions and get on with the task of planning and redesigning their future along more desirable and adaptive lines.

4. Trust: The Emergence of Individuals as "Open Systems"

This parameter is a joint function of the preceding three. Trust accumulates over time as an individual comes to experience the openness of the world he or she shares with others and the mutual respect and consideration likely to accrue from initiating a new topic or depth in communication with the other. As such trust accumulates so do interpersonal relations strengthen and deepen, increasing the probability of mutual learning and network-building. For the management of any learning environment, the emergence of this trust is an over-arching responsibility, involving as it does the individual's trust in his or her own perceptions and learning, the confidence of the group as a whole in their ability to assume responsibility for the management of their futures and their trust in the management as collaborators and persons. All of our concepts and practices must be continually evaluated and revised as we seek to create the above conditions within the space of a single event and also in continuing relationships.

The criterion for this continuous evaluation is the concept of *collaboration* as a coherent and internally consistent mode of function. In practice, we take this to mean people working together as people rather than as roles or positions, ourselves included. We do not hold to the view that our special responsibilities as management absolve us from the task of

behaving in a manner as fully human as any participant--not as career bureaucrats or social technocrats.

By making the assumption that people come to experience confidence and trust only in situations where the conditions for effective two-way communication are present and where there are no externally imposed restrictions on affective or expressive behavior, we constantly test Chein's (1972) thesis that "a behavior is a motive of the behaviors it includes." Collaboration, thus defined, becomes the motive for spontaneously sharing the self with others. Trust accumulates to the extent that people find an opportunity to exercise care about their own and shared concerns and can put away--gradually, without risk--the masks of passivity and dissociation. The resultant release of energy enhances challenge and consciousness and intensifies interpersonal engagement towards association with the task at hand and therefore leads to more mutually supportive action. Without this spiral of trust, learning, energy and commitment the process of implementation would be impossible.

Group Dynamics and Learning

Bion (1952, 1961) discovered a set of phenomena which operate at the *group* level. When people first come together they establish a *group* very quickly. In the early stages, and particularly when there is a "leader," the group will be immature and lacking in self-confidence. From his observations he postulated a dual system of mental functioning. One part entailed a working group mode (*W*) characterized by conscious participation in and cooperation towards task achievement and individual development. It deals rationally in time-bound reality using organization and structure.

The second indicated a proto-mental system of basic group assumptions (*bas*), participation in which requires "no training, experience or mental development. It is instantaneous, inevitable and instinctive" (Bion, 1952:235). Rather than conscious cooperation, a *ba* expresses an individual's

"valency," readiness to enter into combination with the group in making and acting on the *ba*s (Bion, 1961:116). As discussed below, accumulated evidence to the contrary means that Bion's conclusion of inevitability can no longer be accepted.

He distinguished three *ba*s: dependency (*baD*) where the group assumes it exists in order to be sustained by a leader, (*baP*) where the group assumes it has met for the purpose of pairing and (*baF*), fight/flight, where it assumes it has met for the purpose of fighting or running away. All three he saw as modes which preserve the group, maintaining its identity. The basic assumption of "pairing" (*baP*) is dealt with in more detail below.

Bion's early work established a correlation between the *ba*s, *W* and amount of learning and clearly, albeit implicitly, this was related to structure.

As in a bureaucratic structure, in dependency, the individuals do not have a relationship with each other but only with the leader of the dependent group (Bion, 1952:238). The audience in a Design Principle 1 conference has no responsibility for design, content or outcome so it can assume that it "exists in order to be sustained by a leader on whom it depends" (p.235). The "experts" know it all and will look after everything, so the audience can show an unshakable indifference to everything that is said" (Bion, 1961:83). Energy and learning are low and the *baD* group is "quite opposed to the idea that they are met for the purpose of doing work" (p.84). In addition, the emotional tone of the *baD* is negative, guilty, apathetic and depressed. All of the *ba*s exhibit a "hatred of learning" (pp.86-91).

In fight/flight (*baF*) the leader or expert is seen as inimical to the preservation of the group. The feeling of being stirred up represents energy which can produce learning but the learning primarily concerns winning rather than understanding (Bion, 1961:160). The *baF* today is most commonly seen in Mixed Mode conferences where the design principles alternate, rather than in Search Conferences, usually in its fight rather than flight form.

Stating that an individual's groupishness--tendency to the *ba*s--is an inherent property of a social animal did not further our understanding of these phenomena (Sutherland, Vol.I:124.) Early work on the Search Conference and the Multisearch (Emery, M., 1992) confirmed the existence of *ba*s at the large group level. This led to improvements which more reliably prevented their emergence, maximizing the time spent in *W*, and these improvements have shown that the critical variable governing the appearance of *W* and/or *ba*s is choice of Design Principle. There is now solid evidence that the *ba*s and the associated "hatred of learning" are a by-product of attempting to learn in a structure which inhibits cooperative use of all our capacities for coordination and control of our own destinies (Emery, M, 1986:411-32). As Sutherland (p.129) realized, the individual is a system, open to its environment. Choice of Design Principle is the first determinant of a system's task and learning environment.

A pure Design Principle 2 event, such as a well designed and managed Search Conference where the participants are responsible for the content, goes immediately into *W* and stays there. "Organization and structure...are the product of cooperation between members of the group and their effect once established in the group is to demand still further cooperation" (Bion, 1952:239). Because they are responsible as a group, it is in everyone's interest to complete the task creatively and efficiently. Energy is actually generated in *W* through the positive affects--the "joy of learning" (Emery, M., 1986).

Search Conference designers and managers must understand the relation between the design principles and the group assumptions if their work is to produce cohesive learning planning communities. The "hatred of learning" is no more than the playing out of forces generated by structured configurations. These may be simply visualized as in Figure 6. Here we see the relationship between Design Principle 1 and the two most common group assumptions. When coordination and control are strictly preserved by the level above the operator level, i.e., when the leader or managers run a "tight

ship," the group assumption is that of dependency. If the grip of management slackens, there can be a two-way fragmentation of the structure. Fight/flight develops and factions within the group and conflict between factions and/or group and management develop. Group assumptions and structure are two sides of the one coin.

Once these dynamics develop, it can be difficult to return the group to *W*. Prevention is much easier than cure. In particular, Search Conference managers must resist the temptation to mix the design principles by doing such things as interspersing "speakers," however defined, throughout the process. Alternation of the design principles is called the "Mixed Mode" (Emery, M., 1982) and is a reliable recipe for producing fight/flight in particular.

Groups can hear and learn at a level different from the spoken words or intended message. This is the level of "the music of the group." Beyond the level of meaning contained in the words of the conversation and its use towards the ostensible task of the group, can be discerned a further level of group conversation and task which is concerned with the meaning of the *life* of the group and the life of the group involves structure. The ability to hear the music of a group as it sings itself stories about its nature and purpose represents an essential human skill without which we would not have a group life. But today, while that skill is clearly exercised, it mostly remains at a level beneath consciousness. Search Conference managers need that conscious skill but, more importantly, they need the conceptual and practical knowledge to provide pure learning environments uncontaminated by the group assumptions.

1.The Basic Assumption of "Pairing" (*baP)*

The third basic assumption Bion called "pairing" as he saw it arising from the group allowing two of its members to indulge in an animated conversation towards the purpose of building a sexual relationship and,

through the excitement generated by this process, allowing them to assume leadership of the group. Bion noted that in the pairing group there is a most unusual tolerance for people to get on with their discussions, the relation has bonds of a libidinous character and the group is cemented with "messianic hope" as if it contained an unborn genius (Bion, 1961:166-76). One of the characteristic features of pairing was a tendency towards schism. In the course of researching and developing the Search Conference without a Freudian orientation, we have noted a quite different variety of what Bion originally observed as pairing.

Because the Search Conference is designed to prevent the *ba*s, we almost never see instances of *baP* in its schismatic form. Because all group work is self-managing and the participants are wholly responsible for the content, we do not have a structure such as Bion's where he attempted to create a leaderless group through his behavior as leader. In their content work, Search Conferences are genuinely leaderless.

We have seen, however, a phenomenon virtually indistinguishable from the superficial characteristics of *baP* but which, instead of serving the insecure *ba*s, appears to serve as a prelude to the creative working mode for the group as a whole. Pairing sessions are often remembered as particularly helpful (Sutherland, Vol.I:137). Two or more participants will come together in an animated or excited sequence, around a new idea or perspective, forming one or more little buzz groups. This can follow a slow or quiet phase, in which the group appears to be considering its options, or it can erupt from a particularly creative community phase. The idea itself can become the property of the community, sparking it into further creative work and learning. It can be seen, therefore, as part of the community exercising leadership of the learning process.

There have been times when this form of pairing has been observed to be particularly euphoric which creates the thought in a manager's mind of the dangers of a switch to *baF*. This is a reasonable thought as *baP* shares the structure of *baF*. But instead of faction fighting as in Figure 6, either

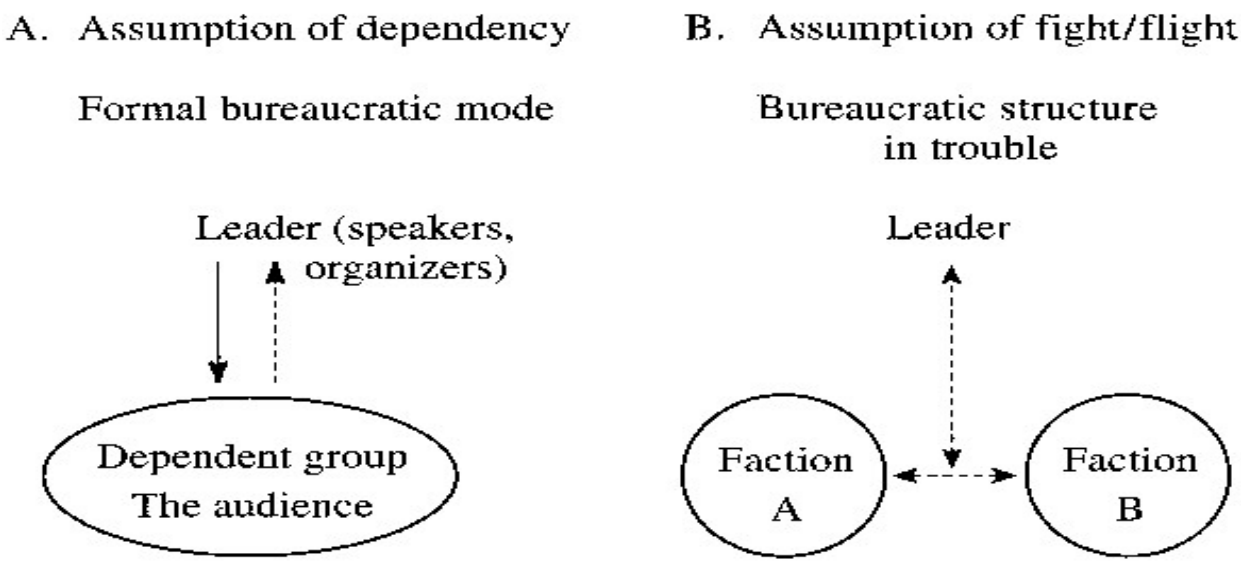


Figure 6. The structure of two group assumptions.

faction A or faction B remove themselves from this dynamic (schism) to replace the current leadership which is perceived to be failing. If the phenomenon is particularly intense or chaotic, it could well be time to call a break, but even this must be carefully considered. If a manager interferes with a process in which the community is totally immersed and which it values highly, this in itself can cause *baF*, either active (fight) or passive (flight). However, taking a break when in doubt can be a good move. Otherwise, a manager can simply ask lightheartedly, "What's the big idea?" and record it as it tumbles out. In this way, the new learning easily becomes the property of the community so that it is amenable to further work and learning.

Because we so often saw *baP* in this form, so easily amenable to development, we tended to believe that Bion had simply got it wrong--that *baP* was merely the first phase of *W* and could be used synonymously with it. However, this proved not to be the answer.

We now have a fully documented example of a Mixed Mode conference which illustrates the interplay of design, management and dynamics. In it we saw *baP*, "pairing" in Bion's original sense. It was schismatic and in no way served the purposes of ecological adaptation. Just the opposite. Its role in

the conference was to prevent *W* and adaptation and the conference failed in its overall purposes. The result of the *baP* was maladaptation.

TABLE 1 Differences Between Pairing (*baP(R)*) and Creative Working Mode (*W*)

Pairing, baP(R)	*Creative Working Mode*, W
Presenting Phenomena	
Emotional tone	
• some are highly excited	• group is excited but controlled
• parallel monologues	• group conversation
• brief bursts of energy	• increasing level of sustained energy
Time frame	
• relatively temporary	• relatively permanent
• unstable	• stable
Maladaptive (Evangelical)	Active adaptive
• one or many bright ideas, tends toward dogmaticism with priorities	• many bright ideas, not dogmatic, will negotiate priorities
• Asymmetyrical relations between the initiators and the rest	• symmetrical relations within the group
Meaning for the Group	
Cocnetic or starting condition	
Expresses realization of Asch's (1952) conditions 1, 2, 3 and tests 4 (trust)	Expresses realization of Asch's 1, 2, 3 and 4
A group emotional ASSUMPTION	A working group REALITY
• testing assumptions of group and manager status; is group allowed to be creative?	• accepts reality of division of labor between manager and participants
• shows immaturity, insecurity of group	• shows maturity and confidence of group as entity
• does not trust manager with process	• trusts manager with process until ready to self-manage
• does not trust manager with content	• trusts manager with some content in the interests of overall task
• the QUESTION asked is "can this group have a group life?"	• the implicit MESSAGE is "we have a group life"
Best Outcome	
Sharing of perceptions toward a possible group purpose	Sharing of perceptions and work toward an established group purpose
Implications for Management	
Very sensitive and vulnerable to managerial response	What good managers hope to achieve as part of their contractual obligation
• likely to lead to fight/flight or dependency if manager appears negative or to misinterpret	• group will work through differences between participant views and ignore manager if attempts to stop self-management; therefore no chance of fight/flight unless manager persists
• useful if manager can generalize and stabilize it as a contribution to the group task	
Can lead to amplification of individual pathologies within the group	Absorption/subjugation of individual pathologies to purpose/task of group
Used in T group to magnify leader power and status	Is inimical to managerial power and status
• easy to manipulate to manager's hidden purpose if any	• difficult to manipulate to manager's hidden purpose if any

2. One Assumption, Two Forms of *baP*

There are, therefore, two forms springing from the same basic assumption. We can call these *baP(S)* for the genuinely schismatic and maladaptive form and *baP(R)* for that form which is regenerative of higher levels of creativity and adaptation for the whole. In the (*S*) form, the leadership, genius or idea remains "unborn," while in the (*R*) form, this embryo develops and is born as the child of the community.

What then makes a *baP* evolve into either its (*S*) or (*R*) form? If the system principle of the process of living is a double pattern, with trends towards increased autonomy *and* homonomy (Angyal, 1941:289), then the (*S*) form represents an imbalance of autonomy over homonomy. In fact, its schismatic quality decreases the probability of homonomy.

The *baP* can be seen as a stimulus which may act as a "contravention" (threatens to break up the system) or as an "opportunity," used for the realization of the system principle of the organism. Then *baP(S)* becomes a "contravention," while *baP(R)* becomes an opportunity--"to fill a gap in the system or to offer the possibility of expression for the basic trends of the organism in some special way" (p.281).

Awareness of the need for additional ideas and creativity, which *baP* represents, should, therefore, result in its use as an opportunity. For a new idea to be treated as an opportunity there must be a climate of openness to new ideas and a value placed on creativity and development. As discussed above, it is the Second Design Principle and the conditions for effective communication which determine this climate and valuing. Failures of design and management of these can, therefore, produce *baP(S)*.

It is Design Principle 2 which provides the form of organization in which people can learn and develop, and management of this organizational form through Asch's (1952) conditions leads to spiraling openness and trust. Homonomy increases as individual and group autonomy and expressiveness develop. Where these organizational and management forms are in place, *baP*

will be expressed and interpreted as *baP(R)*, be grasped as an opportunity for better expression of the community's intent and, therefore, can play its role as a prelude to the stable creative working mode--*W*.

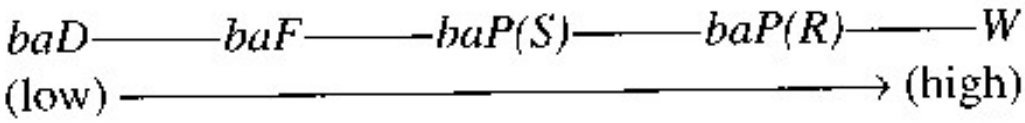
When these conditions are not in place *baP* can just as easily be interpreted as *baP(S)*, harden into it and, rather than the spiral of trust and openness, lead to the vicious spiral of distance, mistrust and further distance. When this dynamic is in train, there is a single rather than a double pattern of evolution, producing the imbalance of autonomy and homonomy. There cannot be in this situation "a complete realization of the system principle" (Angyal, 1941:284).

When *baP(R)* occurs under conditions conducive to learn- ing, its evolution into *W* leads to new creative thrust and even greater learning. There is, therefore, a continuum of learning:

We can now differentiate *baP(R)* from *W*.

There are identifiable differences between *baP(R)* and *W,* and Search Conference managers need to recognize and understand these. Table 1 summarizes these differences.

The presenting phenomena are clearly different and recognizable with practice. There is often a brittle, prickly feeling in the *baP(R)* which can be unmistakable. This arises precisely because of the insecurity of the group as an entity and the fact that *baP(R)* is a test of its ability to function as a creative unit. If well handled by the managers it can flow smoothly into the *W* mode. But if the managers themselves are either insecure in their position or not genuinely enamored of the conference being self-managing, their insecurity or unwillingness will be subtly conveyed. The



result is likely to be a more intense fluctuation of assumptions which has

been known to lead to outbursts of quite severe individual disturbance.

The last item in the Table is a reminder that there are small and large group participative processes which use these dynamics for purposes other than active adaptive learning, planning and responsible self-management.

Summary of Management of Learning

The relationships between the core concepts of the design principles, group assumptions and affective dynamics and learning within the conditions for influential communication have been spelt out in some detail. Figure 7 summarizes some of these relationships, illustrating their highly correlated nature. On the left, we see the conventional, Design Principle 1, conference where lack of responsibility for content by the audience results most commonly in the group assumption of dependency, low levels of energy, often negative affect and certainly little learning. On the right, we see the pure Design Principle 2 case of the Search Conference which is characterized by high energy, positive affect, a great deal of learning and the absence of the group assumptions. These phenomena develop with continuing openness and spiraling trust in the effectiveness of the community's perceptions and conversation.

In the middle is the Mixed Mode. It is important for Search Conference designers and managers to know that "Mixed" cannot mean a synthesis as this is a logical and psychological impossibility (Herbst, 1990). Without this understanding, it is possible to design conferences which will fail, quite unnecessarily. This is not only a waste of resources but also reduces confidence in possibilities for the future. For Search Conference managers who aim to produce learning, action and diffusion, the Mixed Mode--like Design Principle 1--is something to be avoided.

We can sum up these correlations very simply as in Table 2. This Table makes it clear that the only reliable path to ecological learning and adaptation is to start from Design Principle 2.

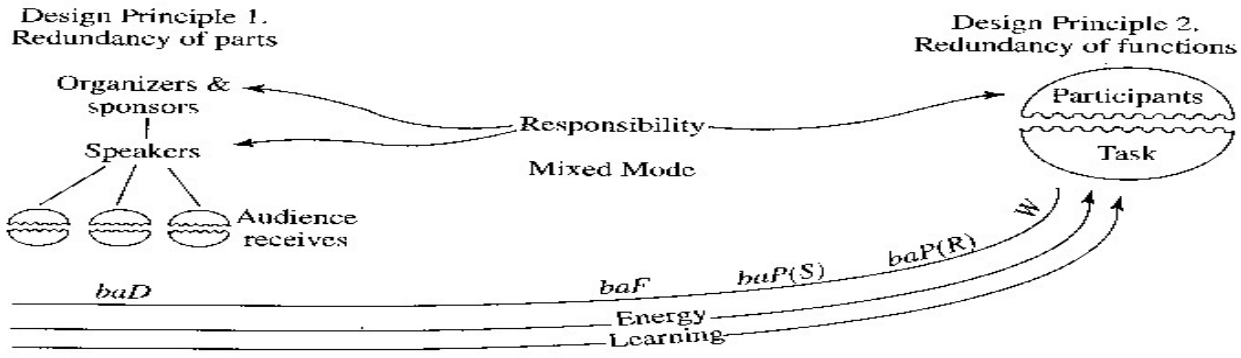


Figure 7. Dynamics and design.

When conscious knowledge of the group assumptional mode and the conditions for influential communication are integrated with the second epistemology of direct perception and the design principles, and practiced within the open systems framework, the major determinants of elicitation of the ideals and a successful Search Conference are in place.

That the Search Conference does what it is designed to do is now beyond doubt. That its designers and managers must have theoretical as well as practical understanding is also beyond doubt (Emery, M., 1993:226-31). Those who wish to learn more of its conceptual foundations and its practical management can consult Emery, M., 1982, 1992, 1993.

TABLE 2 Correlations between Design Principles, Dynamics and Mal(adaptation)

1. At the *broadest level* we have a flow as follows:

Choice of Design Principle	→ mode of function	→ (mal)adaptation

2. At the *next level of detail* we find the most probable outcomes:

Design Principle 1	→ *bas*	→ maladaptation
Design Principle 2	→ *W*	→ adaptation

3. *In detail* we find that the most probable outcomes are

Design Principle 1 (tight control)	→ *baD*	→ maladaptation (dissocition)
Design Principle 1 (loose control)	→ *baF*	→ no change maladaptation
Design Principle 2	→ creative working mode (*W*)	→ adaptation
Mixed Mode (alternation of design principles)	→ *baF* (predominantly)	→ adaptation or maladaptation dependent on management skill

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