

# Imagine

A forum for helping people work effectively together

Volume 1, Issue 2

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## Helping Your Organization From Within

By Ian Curtin (Principle of ICP)

If like the rest of the business world, much of your group's time is spent in meetings, it is imperative that you ask yourself this question: **Are you getting the most you can from your meetings?**

While it is true that input from individual members is an important component of meetings, having a skilled leader or **facilitator** is crucial. A good facilitator has the ability to help participants understand, and respond appropriately to, ideas; he or she can make the difference between whether or not an initiative ever sees the light of day -- the difference between "brainstorming" and "following through".

Once you agree that the quality of your meetings would improve with a facilitator, you have a couple of options. You can use outside facilitators; they can be especially helpful in meetings where divergent views create high emotions, because their "outsider" status ensures impartiality as they guide the group's energy. The downsides are that this can be costly, and, most importantly, it doesn't build facilitation skills **inside** the organization.

Creating a cadre of facilitators is an economical and effective way to build these skills with your organization. Employees who show an interest in helping groups to function more effectively, can receive specific training on leadership, group dynamics and planning skills.

Marian Hess, Director of Human & Organizational Development at Johnson  
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Members of the Johnson County Facilitation Cadre in Kansas

# The Reading Corner


We continue to read in our 'spare' moments. Here are a few treats to consider when you put your feet up.

*Imagin-i-zation* by Gareth Morgan.  
Provides an interesting balance between theory and practical ideas you can try.

The author brings the concepts of the social-constructionist movement into the work world using a variety of images and metaphors. He gives specific examples of how human awareness and knowledge can have a transformative potential. He suggests the images and ideas we hold of ourselves and our world have a fundamental impact on how our realities unfold. Imagine that!

*The Relationship Garden* by Bennett Wong & Jock McKeen. This book is a practical and insightful look at the stages relationships can go through as we each seek intimacy and meaning in our lives - from romance and power struggle to commitment and co-creation. It provides in-depth descriptions of each stage with practical ideas for strengthening your relationships. While the focus is on personal relationships, the same relationship stages are operating in the work environment, (e.g. romance with a new job, power struggle between team members, etc.). This book provides a context within which to review your own set of relationships at home and at work.

*The Courage to Create* by Rollo May. While this book has been around for sometime, I recently reread it and gained even deeper understanding of the creative process. I still am thinking about his contention that "...the creative act arises out of the struggle of human beings with and against that which limits them." This bodes well for our creativity as we struggle to meet the challenges of constant organizational change with increasingly limited resources.

*Leadership and the New Science* by Margaret J. Wheatley. This book provides an easy-to-read summary of a wide range of new science discoveries. She challenges us to incorporate the new principles scientists are using to describe the interactions of the universe. "As physicists describe this participatory universe, how can we fail to share in it and embrace it in our management practices?" 

## ***From the mouths of Babes: Creative Planning Principles***

Last weekend, my brother visited us for the weekend. We had planned to spend sometime with my sister and her family. Unfortunately, my sister caught the flu, so my brother and I decided to pick up her boys and have them stay overnight, giving everyone a little weekend vacation.

On Sunday morning, my brother, two nephews (age 8 and 5 years of age) and I were trying to decide what to do for the day. In generating ideas, I kicked in the tools of the Creative Planning process. We agreed not to discount anyone's ideas and then proceeded to generate over 20 activities we could do. We separated the brainstorming section from the analytical/decision-making process. We had to make a few logistical changes to accommodate the situation.

- ⦿ instead of flipchart paper, we storyboarded on the kitchen window.
- ⦿ ideas were put up in words/pictures/symbols (not all of us can read yet)
- ⦿ instead of dots, we used markers to make dots for our preferences

We all went through two iterations of dotting until we were left with three things that we ALL wanted to do that day. We developed a little action plan and had a great Sunday. We even managed to squeeze in an additional activity that didn't make it into our top three.

### **So what did I learn?**

- ⦿ the Creative Planning process and tools are easy to learn and understand
- ⦿ the process equalizes participants, not only between the kids and adults, but also among the kids (the 5 year-old understood right away that his ideas had the same weight as the 8 year-old's, the 8 year-old figured it out not long after)
- ⦿ we focused on what we wanted and not what was practical
- ⦿ I know that we did what we ALL wanted to do MOST
- ⦿ having made the decision together, we were all committed to the activities (although we did arrange to revisit our action plan 1/2 way through the day)
- ⦿ kids have a longer attention span than many people think. The process took about 45 minutes and the boys were right into it up until we were done
- ⦿ some stuff kids traditionally nag for (let's go to McDonald's) isn't really a priority for them. It was one of the stickies, but never got a single dot

If I had simply suggested a course of action for the day (going to see the Borrowers movie and visiting Butterfly Gardens), I know everyone would have enjoyed that. I learned through the Creative Planning exercise that what we REALLY wanted was to go to Mineral World, do some beachcombing, and play miniature golf (and have a bonus mini-picnic). It turned out to be a great day and yet another chance for Auntie Ilka to learn from her nephews!

Post script: The five year old wondered if he couldn't do the stuff on the other stickies? I assured him that we can always do those things another time. In fact, all the stickies are still up on my kitchen window, a week later...

*Ilka Brake is the Human Resources Manager at BC Ferries and a trained Creative Planning Facilitator*

## Question & Answers

### **Who is a "stakeholder" of a project?**

Those who can affect or be affected by the outcome of a decision.


### **Who is the "sanctioner" of a project?**

The sanctioner has the power to stop the initiative or to influence the implementation of any decision a group might make.



It is important to ensure the sanctioner's direct participation, or if this is not possible, that they are kept informed.

**Who is the "client" of a project?**

The client benefits from decisions made. You must look beyond the participants of a meeting. The facilitator can help you keep focus on "Who will ultimately benefit from our actions here today?" 

**"Facilitation" Cont'd from Page 1** County, Kansas, met this challenge by creating a cross-departmental facilitation cadre. It has 29 members representing 18 County departments.

After receiving in-depth training, Cadre members offer a 'Skills Training to Enhance Performance' for other County employees. They are also trained as Creative Planning Facilitators and are on-call for work groups within the County as neutral facilitators to assist groups in getting the results they want and need.

Jo Ruona, County Training Coordinator, believes the Cadre "exposes employees to tools and behaviors leading toward a high performance organization. Citizens of the County are the ultimate winners."

**Another flavour of the month?**

Among some Cadre members, there is realistic concern that the initiative to teach and demonstrate facilitation will be viewed as 'yet another trend'. Although there has been good support from the County Administration, getting widespread buy-in throughout the organization will take time and resources.

One of the most important aspects of this initiative during these early days, is ensuring that Cadre members keep in touch with each other. They meet monthly to discuss plans for expanding the training to all departments, to share facilitation experiences and to practice their new tools. In addition to these regular meetings, communication through the County e-mail system is encouraged and promoted. Members can access documents such as lesson plans and other word processing files through a central computer network.

**Commitment is key!**


Cadre members quickly find out the depth of their department's commitment. In almost all cases, employees nominated for the Cadre are those same ones who are out-front, leading the change process and often already over-extended.

Ralph Hays, Chief Ranger for the Johnson County Park and Recreation District is a good example of the kind of person who is able to make the commitment. "Sometimes I have to step back and assess my priorities," says Hays. "But even with conflicting priorities, it's a tremendous personal growth experience. I continue to be amazed from day to day. I'm finding out how much I enjoy taking this to other people. It goes beyond the joy of teaching to something that lasts. People can take it wherever they go - they're life skills."

**Are there benefits to departments?**

Most definitely! Workers benefit from the knowledge, experience and new information received by the Cadre member. They have close and easy access to an employee who has been enriched by specialized training, interacts with other departments, and is able to facilitate professionally in a variety of situations.

Sharon Williams, Recreation Manager for the Johnson County Park and Recreation District, can see the benefits not only for her department, but for the entire organization. "I think it's been easier to communicate with more people on the same page throughout the County. It's rewarding to see everyone work toward the same goal. I get less frustrated because meetings seem to run smoother."

Ralph Hays agrees. "The biggest benefit I'm seeing is the training we're doing is beginning to be used in the workplace. When teaching, I am seeing the light come on again in participant's eyes. It's putting the principles we have learned into practice." 

**This Year's Workshops**

**Creative Planning Facilitator Training \$595 Cdn**

**Date:** Nov 6-8/98 & May 21-23/99  
**Place:** pd Seminars  
Gabriola Is., BC Canada

This 3 day, 5 session training workshop will combine concepts, experiential learning and practice sessions in an environment of safety to learn and use the CREATIVE PLANNING method. Each participant will be able to approach, clarify, design and facilitate basic planning sessions using the comprehensive workbook supplied. Participants will be better able to conduct meetings in a faster, more effective manner without diminishing others in the process.

**Effective Team Building \$595 Cdn**

**Date:** Dec 4-6/98 & Sep 17-19/99  
**Place:** pd Seminars  
Gabriola Is., BC Canada

This workshop combines effective communications concepts, experiential learning, and practice sessions. In a safe environment, participants will learn how to release energy needed to meet the challenges of change and feel better about themselves.

Participants will learn how to:

- ✓ identify their own communication blocks and transform old habits
- ✓ discover and apply the principles of effective teambuilding
- ✓ utilize communication skills/principles to bring clarity to working and other relationships
- ✓ lead effective teams and be an effective team-member

**For more information, or to register for workshops, contact:**

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# Teaching the Teachers - Creative Planning

By Leslie Alexander (ICP Associate)

One day I walked into my School Based Team meeting to be told the agenda was a team evaluation. "I wish we had a process for this," bemoaned a colleague.

"Well, I have," I offered. "Give me five minutes," and I disappeared. I returned with chart paper, masking tape, a bunch of sticky dots, 4x6 pads of Post-It Notes and a black chisel tip marker for each person - all the materials we needed. We put chart paper on the wall and began.

First, I explained the Creative Planning process; then we made a commitment not to discount one another, and we were off into a whirl of storyboarding -- expectations, background, relationship ideals, obstacles, what worked, what didn't and so on. My job as "facilitator" was to guide, invent the headers, and keep the process safe and flowing.

The meeting was a bang-up success. So much so that the School Based Team insisted on using Creative Planning in subsequent sessions to work out a mission statement and a school communication plan.

My Principal sat on the School Based Team. Was he pleased? You bet! That year our school was going through accreditation, a year long exhausting process of internal, school-wide self-evaluation culminating in an assessment by an external team. On top of everything else it takes to run a large high school, accreditation seems like a daunting addition to an already overloaded system.

My Principal had an idea. If Creative Planning was successful on a small scale, why not on a large one? The next thing I knew, I was engaged to lead the

entire staff, ninety in total, and take them through an-all day session in the gym.

"Yikes," you say, "too many people!" A lot of people, yes, and so I needed help. Over a lunch hour, I trained twenty selected staff members how to set up and lead a storyboarding session. The rules were simple and they leaned fast. Then, after consulting with the Accreditation Team and with another Creative Planner I knew, in order to develop a plan for the day, my crew and I were ready to go.

What did it look like? Nine tables of ten people each lined two sides of the gym. Two trainees manned each table which had its complement of chart paper on the wall, dots, note pads and markers. Stationed in the middle of the gym with a microphone, I introduced the process, got the commitment not to discount and we were off and running!

The plan for the day was a simple one. The staff already specified five areas of concern to them, such as curriculum, discipline, decision-making, etc. These concerns became the headers. Then the staff worked on two questions for each header. The first question took up the morning; the second, the afternoon.

Question one was: "What gets in the way of better success in the area of \_\_\_\_?" The importance of this question was far-reaching because it not only identified the perceived obstacles to better performance, but it gave the participants an opportunity to air their grievances with safety and with acknowledgment. Once done, the participants were fired up energetically to move on to question two which was: "What do you want to do about creating better success in the area of \_\_\_\_?"

Toward the end of the afternoon, the storyboards for question two were taken from each table and all grouped in one place under their appropriate headers.

Then began a massive dotting with large, black dots. Armed with five dots, each participant read all the contributions and selected his or her preferred five ideas. Later the results were tallied and organized into action committees.

By three o'clock, it had been a great and extremely successful day. First of all, it sped up the accreditation process hugely. An enormous amount of data was generated and synthesized all in one place and in a short space of time. Secondly, the cost was next to nothing (materials only). But in my view, the best outcome was the immense satisfaction of the participants. Most everyone said that for the first time they felt heard and that their opinions counted. Furthermore, they now had an action plan that everyone agreed upon and was involved in. And as if that weren't enough, they had learned a new process to take away with them. What better success could any one meeting have?

## Imagine

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We hope this forum becomes a place where your stories about change in your organization or community are welcomed and can be shared with others. Short articles, news notes and publications are warmly solicited.

*The value of personal relationships to all things is that it creates intimacy ...and intimacy creates understanding ...understanding creates love ...love conquers loneliness.*

...Janais Nin

