

Working To Purpose and Unleashing the Magic in Organizations

By Kathleen D. Dannemiller and Albert B. Blixt

Unpublished draft of article to be published in 1999 in Consulting Today

When an organization experiences a dramatic transformation as a result of a whole systems intervention, the results feel like "magic." This is what people tell us and it is also what we experience ourselves when we're doing the work. The purpose of this article is to explore what we and our clients mean by "magic" and to explain how having a total commitment to focusing on purpose and outcomes to be achieved is key to unleashing the magic within organizations.

In our organizational change work, we believe that magic is found in profound and simple human interaction (conversations) in the context of a complex system view of the past, present and future. We also believe that each of us is looking for purpose and meaning in our lives. As process consultants, we are guided by the need to empower people around a compelling purpose - for themselves and for their organization. Developing an inspiring, common purpose is more than a technique; it is a way of being that ensures that we are doing the right work at any given moment.

Using A Event Planning Team To UnLeash The Magic

One place where the magic is most visible is in large group meetings that bring together a critical mass of an organizational system. In planning such events, we work with an Event Planning Team, which is chosen to be a microcosm of the whole system with which we're working. The work of the Event Planning Team (EPT), usually accomplished in two days, is to agree on a statement of purpose and kinds of conversations that will take place in the meeting. Success in that large group meeting requires creating a truly worthwhile, ennobling, appropriate purpose and then designing the work to achieve the purpose.

The question we ask of the Event Planning Team is: "What needs to be different in the world because these people got together to build a common database?" When the purpose has been developed, agreed upon and celebrated by the Event Planning Team, the team can then continue to design the flow of work and conversations that will achieve that purpose.

For us, working to purpose with an Event Planning Team means:

Continuously asking "Why?"

At every step of any process we undertake, we ask "What will be different because we are doing this?" "Why is it important to do this?" "Who do they need to hear from and why?"

Going Deep and Wide

Ensuring that the right (needed) stakeholders are being asked to describe the things the EPT believes the whole group needs to know in order to be able to achieve the desired purpose.

Being Focused

Helping the team to say "No" to things that, while interesting, are not likely to truly move us toward our purpose.

Being Observant

Operating as a team, with "one-brain and one heart" to observe and predict what will have really happened as a result of trying something in new ways.

Being Flexible

Being constantly in an inquiry mode, willing to change what we are doing as a team, and later with the whole group, if it does not seem to be working to get us to our purpose

Being Persistent

Empowering the team to stay on course, even when they are tired or discouraged or feeling hopeless. This often requires giving voices to those who are discouraged and unleashing the voices of people who have ideas and hope.

Being Forgiving

Forgiving of ourselves and others when the team gets diverted and needs to change the path they have followed. The team needs to be willing to pick up and resume the quest - over and over. Ron Lippitt, one of the treasured founders of our OD work, taught us to be able to throw away the first few plans and try again. Wisdom will be the end product.

Being Inclusive

We need to ensure that we have a purpose that will combine the yearnings of all who are going on the journey with us. Because the purpose we've chosen may just represent those on the team, it is critical to continuously ask the question, "Is someone or some group missing from this discussion? If they are, let's get them in here as part of our planning."

Thinking Big

Ensure that the purpose and agenda are truly worthy of the time, talents, energy and wisdom that will be invested in achieving it. Keep asking the question, "Are we one the right track still? If we are successful will it still feel worthwhile?"

Practical Ways to Design An Agenda to Achieve a System-wide Complex Action Plan for the Future

Whether working with large groups or small, here are some ways to make sure the system is engaged:

- Engage microcosms at every stage of the change effort to help you be inclusive, think big and be observant of what is going on in the system as a whole.
- Work constantly to extend the horizon of the group - more expansive data and a bigger picture of the world is the key to a wider perspective, thinking big and being able to empower the whole group in being observant and flexible.
- Make it safe to participate at every step. Ask questions or give assignments that will enable people to use what they already know and feel wise/smart as they take the risk of being vulnerable. Make each person's truth a respected part of the whole picture.

- Support the over-all purpose with smaller purposes at every step. Share the purpose you have as a consultant with the Event Planning Team. Keep asking "Why are we doing this now?" and "What would you really want to be discussing or hearing right now?" Help the team to make sure they believe that the planned assignment is the right work to be doing at this moment.
- We believe we should never work alone as a consultant. Having a partner will be an immense help in being observant, being flexible and being persistent. And, as Ron Lippitt taught us, if you work alone (no matter how smart you think you are) you will be cheating your client.

"DVF" - Our Magic Formula In the 1970s, we learned a formula from Dick Beckhard. He tells us that he meant it as a description of how you reduce resistance to change. We believe it is the true answer to the question: How do we unleash the magic? Many of you know this formula by now: It says:

Change occurs when $D \times V \times F > R$

In order to bring about change, in an individual and/or in an organization, you need to get to "one common multi-faceted brain" and one common, compelling multi-focused heart" around these elements: **Dissatisfaction** with things as they are right now (D) x **Vision** combined and compelling about what we yearn to be in the future (V) x agreement on all the effective actions and First Steps we can be doing to move in the direction of that vision (F), where the sum of this equation has to be larger than the combined **Resistance** to change (R).

The key to that equation is that if any of the elements is zero, the product will be zero, and you will not be able to overcome resistance to change. We each resist change if we are not dissatisfied or if we do not have an ennobling vision of what we could be, or if we can't think of any actions that we believe will make a difference. $D \times V \times F > R$

Work To Purpose and Watch The Magic Unfold

The magic evolves when the three elements do indeed overcome resistance. When all three are in place, D, V, and F, each of us and all of us will simply see the world differently and understand what we each can do differently to make things work correctly. A paradigm shift will have occurred in the group that has been doing the system-wide work, and at that moment, each of us and all of us are changed.

We know "magic" has been unleashed when:

- People are discovering their world more fully, both as individuals and as a complex group
- People are combining their yearnings into a new and compelling common vision of the future
- People are feeling valued and heard
- People are taking increased risks and responsibility
- New ideas are emerging from the wisdom of the group
- People are getting increasingly excited about new possibilities
- The "euphoric interface" is present in the room - - the moment when people realize their world has changed forever in ways that allow them to live their dreams

- People are connected by thinking and feeling as "one brain and one heart "and then being able to act out of that unity
- People are experiencing their own individual power in new ways
- People are experiencing a profound sense of belonging
- People are feeling proud of being part of something bigger than themselves
- People are letting go of the need to think about the old concept of "right" and "wrong" -- recognition of the validity of multiple realities.

Kathie Dannemiller can be reached at kdann@earthlink.net

Al Blixt can be reached at alblixt@aol.com