

Title

Integration through Interactive Process: A Case Study.

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Abstract

This paper presented in the form of a case study, shares the experiences that the authors had in their endeavor to promote cultural integration of the employees of an acquired company with the parent organization. The authors who were working on this intervention with an external consultant had varied experiences in the planning phase, execution phase, and in the post execution phase. The purpose of this paper is to capture and share those experiences which promote learnings for the fellow practitioners in the area of designing, executing, and documenting and actioning large scale change initiatives, especially in the context of acquisitions. The authors realized that the program design would keep evolving till the end of the program, and providing structure to such evolutionary design is the essential challenge that an O.D. practitioner faces in a real time change intervention. Another realization was that it is not only the concept and its execution but also extensive logistics planning that clinches the day for such programs. The authors experienced that maintaining the energy and momentum through the program is another big challenge. It is equally important to know when to end, as it is important to know when to start. This paper documents all these learnings and also raises some thought provoking questions for discussion.

Scheme of he Paper

This paper is written in a free flowing case study style. However, there is a structure that is there in that free flow. The paper begins with a brief abstract that explains to the reader what to expect in the paper, and this abstract is followed by an introduction section that essentially speaks about the context. The next section is the methodology section wherein the authors give a brief glimpse of the theory and the resources available for designing such large scale interventions. This is followed by a brief description of the preparatory activities, in the Pre work section. The next section talks about the program and emphasizes on its evolutionary nature. Finally the key learnings of the paper are summarized, and a list of some select readings is appended.

Introduction

The due diligence was over. The top management of Sasken were satisfied about that the proposed acquisition of Isoftech made business sense. It was a good combination of technological, and offerings synergy, and locational advantage. The top management of Isoftech was also optimistic. They were now convinced that the company could achieve greater strategic advantages, as it could have resulted in greater synergies. However, there was one person in the entire group who was still feeling uneasy about the future prospects. He was wondering whether these perceived synergies get translated in business results without cultural integration, and emotional bonding between the employees of the two companies. He was wondering whether, the two companies be able to work together, if sincerity of purpose was not clearly established.

His key concerns thus were;

1. Whether the synergies will get translated in to Business Results,
2. Whether it will happen without cultural integration and emotional integration,
3. Will the two companies be able to work together,
4. Will the employees be able to work together,
5. What could be done to allay the fears of the employees of the acquired company,

Essentially, his key concern was, will it work, rather, how to make it work!

That person was the Head of HR.

However, he was a seasoned person, he had handled such situations earlier also.

Now the time had come to put his thoughts together and set the ball rolling.

Over the years he had created around himself a team of highly qualified and experienced HR professionals, whose advices he relied upon. He immediately decided to convene a meeting to discuss the situation, and to work out an action plan.

They had their first meeting. One professor who was a common friend of all of them had also joined. In course of discussion, many ideas were thrown up. One said that let us quickly do a gap analysis, and then see what are the differences between the policies of the two companies so that we can assess what needs to be changed, and what needs to be told, what are the issues on which the employees need to be educated upon. Another idea that came was dealt with how to train the employees of the acquired company in the values of Sasken. The third idea that did the rounds was that of addressing the cognitive and the affective issues both together in one go through a training program.

Each of these ideas had their own merits. However, none of these was a clinching one. The gap analysis had to be done, but it in no way ensured that it would result in bonding that he was envisaging. The values idea was a good one, but it would have looked like sermonizing and could have thus become counter productive. The mixing up of cognitive and affective issues was summarily rejected, though it was appreciated that both these issues need to be addressed. Thus, though ideas were flowing smoothly, the team was not

nearing any conclusion, and this was becoming frustrating for them. Now was the time for the Professor to chip in. He started in his own typical way of making suggestions very indirectly, and generally started asking the group as to how did the Last LSIP go when they had organized it for the company as a whole in some different context. The Head HR, literally jumped from the chair, and said, forget about the last one, let us have a LSIP (Large Scale Interactive Process) Program for addressing this. Everyone started smiling. They knew that He had stumbled upon the golden idea that was so far being so elusive. They took a small break to let the idea sink in and to collect their thoughts. Thereafter, they met again and decide to prepare their own notes for about half an hour and then discuss the issue again.

The Professor was moderating their next meeting. The first question that he asked was a dampener. “Why are you getting so excited about LSIP” was the question that he asked. None was expecting this question so it came with a thud. However, all of them had been working with the Professor in the past in different capacities and thus they immediately realized that he wanted them to assess the superiority of the method in this context, so that when they have to convince others about the utility of such exercise they can be crystal clear in the expression of their thoughts. They all put their heads together and prepared a brief concept note on LSIP. They reviewed this, and refined it till the whole thing was reduced to just one page. Now the professor wanted them to understand what are the pre work that needs to be done. Immediately, the entire team started talking in terms of dates, hotel bookings, air passages etc., and were disappointed when the professor admonished them that logistics was not what he wanted them to discuss at this juncture. He reminded them about the discussions that they were so passionately having about other methods, before the idea of LSIP came. Again all of them got the message. Quickly everyone started discussing about where to bring in Sasken values, where to bring in the cognitive issues. After a lot of deliberation, they decided that before the LSIP they needed to complete a few things. The following were the decisions that they took:

- They decided to conduct a full-fledged gap analysis to understand what are the key gaps in the HR policies of the two companies. This was important for more than one reason. They were cognizant that in view of section 2s, and 25f of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, this clarity was essential, because they needed to know very clearly about what differences they were likely to make in the conditions of service of the employees if they superceded their existing policies with the policies of the parent company. Another reason for importance of this gap analysis was that it would help them to understand what policies were grossly different between the two companies. This would them to emphasize more on those policies in all their future communications with the employees. The third reason was that it would help them to know if certain drastic changes were required to be made. Another reason was that it would help them to satisfy themselves about the statutory compliances. Finally, it might have helped them in identifying whether there was some policy or guideline existing in the acquired company that could be imported for the benefit of the entire organization. Thus, they decided to do a gap analysis. Immediately, one of them picked up the phone, spoke to the head of HR of the acquired company, firmed up the travel details for conducting the gap analysis, and prepared, discussed, and decided on a project plan for doing the same within a week.

- They decided that immediately after the gap analysis report were available they would organize a communication meeting/ awareness session with all the employees of the acquired company, and therein, they would educate them about the policies that were existing in the parent company and were likely to be extended to the acquired company. The professor suddenly chipped in with a brilliant suggestion. He suggested that in this program there should be a clear communication not only about the policies of the company but also about the values and philosophy behind the same, and the same should be communicated to them by the person heading HR, so that everything being communicated there automatically acquires a great deal of finality. However, in spite of all this progress, However, the Head HR was still restless. Something was still amiss. He was not comfortable with the idea of making this program an entirely HR affair. He was trying to find how the whole thing could be given an overall business perspective, and then one of them came up with an idea which made everyone sit up. The Deputy manager HR a seasoned member of their team, suggested, “acquisition has happened, both the companies’ top management have seen tremendous business sense in the same, but what about the employees of the acquired company. Have they seen any advantage accruing to them as a result of this deal, have they seen the overall business advantage arising out of this deal? Let us advise the CEO or the COO to be a part of this program, and one of them can then explain to the employees, what are the business level/ corporate level advantages of the deal, and what advantages shall an employee expect to get out of this deal.” Finally, The Head HR’s eyes lit up. “That’s it” he said. “We will have the program for half a day there, with just two sessions, in one session the business talk would be delivered by the COO, and in the other session I will explain to them about the values, philosophies and policies of the company.” With this, the cognitive part of the integration effort was settled. Now they knew what they had to do before the LSIP. The idea was to clarify all such issues before hand so that the agenda of LSIP does not hijacked by such issues, and clarifications thereto. He immediately assigned the task of organizing this session, to two of his seasoned campaigners, The Deputy manager HR and the manager HR.
- At this stage itself, He requested The Deputy manager HR and The manager HR to work on two more things, the logistics of the program, and the design of the program.

The meeting was over, it was fruitful, it was decisive, and all of them went home very satisfied that day. The professor also left the meeting venue with a smile on his face.

The Methodology:

The Deputy manager HR and The manager HR met in the office the next day and decided to go ahead with the preparations. They opened the one page note about LSIP that they had prepared, as both of them had always believed that for something to deliver solid results sound theoretical backing was always a must. Thus, it was like back to the college days for both of them in the office that day. They went through the note, and then reviewed, and expanded that. They took out lots of books,

including text books for looking at the theory once again, and finally prepared the revised summary sheet from their favorite text book Cummings and Worley that they had always referred to when they were formal students of the HRM discipline. They titled this note, as Large Group Interventions. The note that they had thus written as a reference material for them during the whole preparation for the program is furnished below:

Large Group Interventions.

(Extracts and/ or Summary from page 149, and pages 254 through 262 of “Organization Change and Development” by Cummings and Worley, 7th Edition).

Definition: Involve getting a broad variety of stake holders in to a large meeting to clarify important values, to develop new ways of working, to articulate a new vision for the organization, or to solve pressing organizational problems. Such meetings are powerful tools for creating awareness of organizational problems and opportunities and for specifying valued directions for future action.

These are also called:

- Search conferences,
- Open systems planning,
- Future Searches.

Focus: Issues affecting the whole organization.

Total more than 100 people for 2 to 4 days.

Usually include futuring and visioning exercises. Open systems approach.

Key Assumptions:

1. Organization members’ perceptions play a major role in environmental relations,
 - Include what parts of organization attended to or ignored,
 - What value is placed on these parts,
 - Provide basis for planning and implementing specific actions.
2. Organization members must share a common view of the environment to permit coordinated action toward it,
 - Perceptual disagreements
3. Organization members’ perceptions must accurately reflect the condition of the environment if organizational responses are to be effective,
 - Misperceptions can be there.
4. Organizations cannot only adapt to their environment; they must create it proactively.

Note: Focus on organization's potential rather than on problems increases members' energy for change, and build a broad consensus toward a new future.

Open-Systems Method:

Application Stages:

- Preparing for the large group meeting.
- Conducting the meeting.
- Follow up on meeting outcomes.

Preparing for a Large-Group Meeting:

1. Compelling meeting theme,
 - Compelling point or Focus of Change,
 - Senior Leaders need to make it clear to others the purpose of this meeting,
2. Appropriate Participants,
 - Get the whole system in to the room,
3. Relevant Tasks to address the Conference Theme,
 - Sub groups to be assigned relevant tasks.

Conducting the Meeting:

1. Map the current environment surrounding the Organization,
 - Different domains or parts of the environment are prioritized,
 - List all external groups directly interacting with the organization,
 - Rank them in importance,
 - Describe each domain's expectations for the organization's behavior.
2. Assess the organization's responses to environmental expectations,
 - Participants to describe how the organization currently addresses the environmental expectations as listed in 1 above.
3. Identify the core mission of the organization,
 - This step identifies the core mission or underlying purpose of the organization,
 - Derived from how the organization responds to external demands,
 - Attention: to as revealed in 1 and 2 above, and not to as stated.
4. Create a realistic future scenario of environmental expectations and organization responses,
 - Project the organization and its environment in to the near future,
 - What will happen if the organization continues to operate as it does at its present,

- Accordingly, prepare a likely organization future of the organization under the assumption of no change.
5. Create an ideal future scenario of environmental expectations and organization responses,
 - Members to create alternative desirable future.
 - Go back to 1, 2, and 3 and ask what they would ideally like to see happen in both the environment and in the organization.
 - Let them fantasize about desired futures without worrying about possible constraints.
 6. Compare the present with the ideal future and prepare an action plan for reducing the discrepancy.
 - Identify specific action that would move both the environment, and the organization toward the desired future.
 - Planning: tomorrow, six months from now, two years from now.
 - Follow up schedule for sharing the flow of actions and updating the planning process.

Note: The last task of this method is to create an agenda for change. Participants are encouraged to reflect on what they have learnt from the meeting, and to suggest changes for themselves, their departments, and for the whole organization. Members from the same department are often grouped together to discuss their proposals and decide on action plans, timetables, and accountabilities.

Action items for the total organization are referred to a steering committee.

At the end all these action plans are submitted to all participants, and their initial commitment to change is sought.

Follow Up on Meeting Outcomes:

These are vital for implementation.

Communicate results of the meeting to the rest of the organization, gaining wider commitment to the changes and the change process.

If everybody was already involved then proceed to implementation directly based on the action plan.

Open – Space Method:

This method is distinguished by its lack of formal structure. These methods temporarily restructure or self-organize participants around topics and interests associated with the conference theme.

The Key Steps:

1. Set the conditions for self-organizing,
 - Set the stage by announcing the theme, and the norms,

- Participants informed that in the meeting there would be small group discussions.
 - Two sets of norms: a. “Law of Two-feet”: it gives freedom to the participants, Roles of bumblebees, and Butterflies are also there. B. Norm of “Four Principles”: whoever comes is the right people, whatever happens is the only thing that could have, whenever it starts is the right time, and When it is over, it is over.
2. Create the agenda,
 - Develop a road map for the remainder,
 - Ask participants to describe a topic related to the theme in which they have interest,
 - Announce the topic to the group,
 - Convene and have the meeting, let everyone speak.
 3. Coordinate activity through information,
 - Can coordinate in two ways: 1. each morning and evening, have a community meeting to announce topics, and schedule for discussion. Also to share observations, and learnings.
 - Second, the conveners to update with summaries of each meetings.
 - Participants are encouraged to visit newsroom.

They had also collected many reference materials for guidance, so that they could prepare a robust design for the program.

Some of these materials’ reference is noted below:

- Leith’s guide to Large Scale Intervention Methods, by Martin Leith, published by the Innovation Agency (2001).
- A Short Manual of Open Space Technology: Compiled by Dr Madhukar Shukla.
- Owen, H. (1992). *Open Space Technology: A User's Guide*. Potomac MD: Abbott Publishing.
- Weisbord, M.R. (1992). *Discovering Common Ground*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Weisbord, M.R. (1987). *Productive Workplaces: Organizing and Managing for Dignity, Meaning, and Community*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

They also collected some web resources. An illustrative is furnished below:

- <http://www.openspacetechnology.com/articles.html> [contains good articles and cases on use of OST]

- <http://www.openspaceworld.org/wiki/wiki/wiki.cgi?OpenSpaceFacilitatorsToolbox> [Huge set of resources for designing and facilitating the OST]
- <http://www.globalchicago.net/wiki/wiki/wiki.cgi?OpenSpaceTech> [another comprehensive set of links]

Now that they had satisfied themselves with the material that they had collected, they started a discussion in the right earnest regarding the appropriateness of the various technologies for their particular context. The debate could have been the delight of any OD practitioner for its theoretical soundness, and the passion with which these technologies were being discussed. The Head HR came looking for them for some other discussion, and found them deeply engrossed in the discussion, and with a smile he left them alone knowing fully well that the program was in safe hands.

The discussion was about the appropriateness of the technology in their context. The context as they had defined was as under:

- What would be the feelings/ perceptions of the employees, about the program, would they be skeptical or would they be enthusiastic,
- What would be the energy level of the participants,
- How structured the program needed to be, would it be better to make it a free flowing spontaneous emerging design, or would it be better if the program was designed to its last detail.
- What was the outcome to be targeted,
- Was it better to be a puritan and go with one school of thought or was it better to arrive at a hybrid model.

These were the questions that needed to be addressed for them to be able to prepare an appropriate design for the program.

In course of the discussion, they zeroed in on one solution. They decided that in a maximum of three words they should try to define the theme of the program, and once that is decided then rest of the things can be revolved around that overarching theme. They decided that they themselves would go for the Gap Analysis, and that they would accompany the team of The Head HR and the CEO for the awareness program also. This they wanted to do in order to get a first hand smell of the place so that they could refine their program/ intervention design accordingly. And that is exactly what they did. They went ahead for the gap analysis work, and in the process met many employees there in formal as well as in the informal settings. These meetings enabled them to assess the perceptions of the employees. Accordingly, they provided The Head HR, and the COO with their inputs for the awareness program. One key input that they provided was to approach the awareness program from the perspective of, "What is there in it for me." Both The Head HR and the COO bought this idea, and they delivered their talk around that theme only. Thus, the gap analysis and the awareness program both served its purposes for preparing the ground for the LSIP. Now The Deputy manager HR and The manager HR were again back to the task of defining the theme of the program. They

firmly held that unless this is decided nothing else can be moved in a well guided manner.

In course of their gap analysis and the awareness program visits, they had realized that one of the main stumbling blocks for the realization of the perceived synergies from the deal was the continued feeling of Us and Them. This had to be bridged. This gave them the cue to devise the theme of the program, and after a lot of discussion suddenly it was eureka. They got the two, three words they were looking for. The Two words were, “One Sasken.”

With this they informed The Head HR that the theme was decided and now rest was a matter of details that could be worked out, without any serious stumbling block. Once the theme was decided, the next question was whether to identify the leading questions for the program or to let that evolve in the program. They decided to go for a hybrid model and not a puritan one to suit their specific needs. They decided to go for a program with minimal structure. The first design that they had now drafted was revolving around the Open space Technology with minimum structure and maximum space for freedom.

Having prepared this document of design, they started discussing amongst themselves the pros and cons of the design thus devised. In course of their deliberations they realized that perhaps they had kept the program rather too open, and free, and thus they became apprehensive, whether so much of lack of structure would yield results or not. They also started wondering whether the participants would be able to deal with so much of lack of structure, because, they had assessed that the participants were not very enthusiastic about the idea or utility of LSIP. Indeed the design they had prepared had left everything other than the theme of the program open. They were not sure whether the program could be run successfully, and were not prepared to take so much of a risk. Therefore, amongst themselves they decided to adjourn the discussion on the same for some time and then assemble again with a fresh mind to have another look at the design.

As decided they assembled again, and once again started discussing the program design. This time they decided that they could not take such a big risk by going for such an open and structure less design. They felt that if the structure could be injected in the design to an extent that the relevant issues could be identified, and then structured discussions and presentations on the same could be made then the program would be really successful in terms of tangible results. They agreed, and The manager HR took charge of revising the design, and then reviewing the same with The Deputy manager HR before finally presenting it to The Head HR. The manager HR was good at structuring any thing. He went ahead with this task with a great professional zeal, and prepared the design the same night. The next day they sat. The manager HR was very happy. He was thinking that this time they have arrived at some thing final. However, that was not to be.

The moment The manager HR started his presentation, The Deputy manager HR pointed it out clearly that it would not work. The manager HR also immediately agreed. In fact in his enthusiasm to make a design that would involve maximum work, and maximum tangible result, The manager HR had merrily forgotten that their program was starting on

a Thursday evening, which meant that the participants would work for the entire day at office, and then after a travel of one and a half hours assemble for the program. Overlooking this The manager HR had structured the program from 7pm till 1am the same night. The Deputy manager HR was sure that it won't work, and this he pointed out very candidly. The manager HR, always having great respect for The Deputy manager HR as a senior and seasoned professional saw the point in The Deputy manager HR's argument. Now once again both of them were sitting without any design. However, quickly they realized that the fault this time was not with the design but with the timings arranged for the program. They decided to just reschedule the program in such a manner that it does not become too hectic and tiring for the participants. Accordingly, they made the schedule a bit lighter for the participants, and closed the discussion with a clear consensus that the program needs to produce tangible results, and for that they were clear that the program needed to be structured and guided closely. They not only defined the program to the detail but also clearly defined their own roles in the program, as both of them were clear in their minds that the program was too important and nothing could be left to chance. Then they decided to discuss their design with The Head HR so that they could finalize everything and move ahead accordingly.

Their meeting with The Head HR was a disaster. He was in complete disagreement with the design that they had prepared. His views could be summed up like this:

- We are trying to emphasize too much on tangibles, while the objective is to strive for cultural integration, and emotional bonding,
- We are trying to put in too much of a structure that would stifle creativity, which is essential for maintaining the interest and energy level in the program,
- We are trying to put so much emphasis on getting definable results, and in the process we have ignored the theme of the program,
- In spite of providing so much of structure in the program we do not have the required leading questions, which may be looked in to during the program.

The Head HR got impatient, as time was now running out. Just at that time the Professor walked in, saying that he was just passing by and felt like meeting them and enquiring about the progress on the design. All of them felt that the professor could not have come at a better time. They explained to him the situation. The manager HR expressed with deep anguish that with great deal of studies, deliberations, and discussion they had arrived at a final design, and were on the verge of scrapping it now, and thus they did not have any design now and time was running out, and that things were not going all right.

The professor assured them that nothing could go wrong. He immediately volunteered to come with them for the program. He confirmed to them that things could still be worked out. He in fact admonished them for not really being open to real time change in their own design, while they were trying to conduct an intervention that was essentially real time change management. He asked The manager HR to present the design to him. Once again The manager HR laboriously opened his PC and started making the presentation. Professor kept nodding during the presentation. The manager HR was confused. He did not know what was there on the mind of the professor. Once the entire presentation was over the professor clapped calling it a good design, and said that things could be worked

out around the design. He reassured them that there was no need to worry and things would work out. The entire program was to begin the next evening, for duration of Thursday evening, Friday day and night and Saturday whole day.

For the Thursday evening all that was there in the original design was, a ninety minutes inaugural game for emphasizing the need of creating a win – win situation, a ninety minutes exercise on writing the key issues of past, present, and future. The professor encouraged them by saying that the program would begin with the game as planned. Thereafter, instead of going for a group discussion, and presentation on the issue of past, present, and future, he suggested a change in the format. His view was that after the game one room should be kept prepared with a past wall, a present wall, and a future wall. The participants would walk in after the game, and would write their comments on the pre-designated wall (of course covered with writing boards). His reasoning was very simple. He wanted that there should be lots of movement and lots of rubbing of shoulders in the entire exercise. Thus, essentially there was no intrinsic change in the design of the first day. Everybody agreed on the design of the day one. The professor told them that they would think of the design for the next day later, and they concluded their meeting. Now there was little time left for doing the review of the pre work of the program and The manager HR immediately decided to devote the next couple of hours on that.

The Proceedings: Pre – Work:

The manager HR always a man with an eye for details was good at it. He had carefully prepared a list of stationery items that would be required for the program. He had also carefully prepared all the relevant presentations, had taken adequate hard copies of the same, and was also repeating and cross checking his instructions to his counter parts in the other company, to whom he had given certain responsibilities regarding the arrangement of stationery items, and infra structure. Though the program was beginning late in the evening he had decided to reach the venue early in the morning to check for himself, whether the venue was adequately geared up for different parts of the program, at least for those parts of the program that was already decided. In spite of all this, as a matter of precaution he packed a big bag of stationery items with himself also so that if there is any gap in the arrangement at least he has got something to fall back upon.

He also meticulously reviewed with the travel agent about all the details of all the persons traveling for the program. They had convinced the CEO, COO, and all the Vice Presidents of the company to come for this program, as they had realized that it would demonstrate to the employees that the top management was sincere and was willing to devote time on integration matters. Visible top management support was essential for the success of the program, which lied in establishing the sincerity of purpose. Having reviewed all these arrangements, he once again turned his attention to the design part.

The Proceedings: During the Program- An evolutionary Design

In the flight he again started his discussion with the professor. The Deputy manager HR joined them. They now wanted to have greater clarity about the day II of the program. They decided to do that once they complete the inspection of the program venue. At the

program venue, the arrangements were found to be inadequate. The conference hall was too small for free movement of 100 odd participants, for variety of displays being put up simultaneously, for activities being run over microphone simultaneously. They immediately started looking for creating alternatives. They immediately arranged for two smaller halls adjacent to the main hall so that the activities could be run parallel. They were now arranging for all the equipments so that once the program starts, every thing goes smoothly in a clock work precision.

The first activity of the evening was to run a game on win-win situations. This game required them to break the participants in to three large groups and to sub divide the same in to three teams each. Now the evolution really started. Initially, they had decided to run the three groups simultaneously with three instructors. However, the hall was too small for this. They immediately modified the pattern. The manager HR decided to become the only facilitator for all the three groups, while the other two facilitators quickly agreed to play the role of scorers only. With this, they organized the room in an appropriate seating arrangement, which though fixed for the beginning was flexible enough to be changed as and when required. They realized that it was essential to ensure that for such programs one should ensure that one does not get a fixed theater style seating arrangement. They also arranged the flip boards (three for the first game, and ten in total) for the first game. Now, with this they could turn their attention to the physical arrangements for the second activity of the day.

The second activity of the evening was to get the participants to express their views on the past present and future. They immediately, started inspecting the physical arrangements for the same, and while doing so started thanking The Head HR who had given them the idea to seek the help of students from a local college imparting MBA education. Two students had come to help them out, and learn in the process. They were youthful, enthusiastic, and starry eyed. They were fast. They immediately understood what was to be done, and covered all the four walls of the smaller conference hall with thick brown paper and kept in neat arrangement, markers in adequate numbers at all the walls. Now the physical arrangements for the second activity were also ready. The attention was to turn to the arrangements and timings of dinner now. They assessed as to what would be the time by which the participants would be free for dinner, and advised the resort kitchen manager accordingly. Now day I arrangements were sealed and they could sit in discussion on the topic of day II design and arrangements.

The discussion revolved around the advisability of pre deciding the leading questions. It was felt that some leading questions shall be decided, so that they could ensure that the discussions go in the required direction during the next two three days. The professor assured them. He said that leading questions shall be designed, and kept ready, and you would be seeing for yourself that once the participants complete the exercise of writing on the walls, the similar things would emerge as a common underlying themes. With this in mind they brain stormed and decided on six leading questions, and kept that ready in their lap tops for ready reference. All the preparations were over now. It was decided to complete the day's activities by 10:30pm and then after everything is over, then assemble in the smaller conference hall to see and analyze the participants' writings on the walls. At this juncture, it was also decided that at the end of the day each participant would be

given a sticker, which he could paste on a board, indicating whether he/ she was glad, mad or sad with the way things had progressed thus far.

The program began at 8pm. The Deputy manager HR started the proceedings by welcoming all the participants. Out of around 100 expected participants, 85 had assembled under one roof. All the others were either out of town, or unwell, or on leave. Thus, attendance was good. After the introductions and welcome, the game started. The manager HR was trying hard to facilitate the game for three groups simultaneously, and was being ably supported by two facilitators who because of the physical constraints of the size of the hall had accepted the role of co scoring and were thus not giving common instructions. As the game progressed, energy levels built, and it became impossible for The manager HR to handle all the groups. The other two facilitators quickly changed back to their pre designated roles, and now all of them, in spite of all the constraints were running the game simultaneously in perfect synchrony. The game finished at the designated time and with expected results. The need for win-win style, and trust was established, and energy levels had got increased. A small debrief session was held after the game, and thereafter announcement was made regarding the next activity in the adjacent hall. The participants moved to the adjacent hall, and started the next activity, completely unsupervised. The idea was to let them have complete freedom to write with an open mind, without feeling constrained in any manner. They completed the exercise, and proceeded for dinner, with a promise to return at 8:30am next morning. The LSIP team now assembled in the hall. The students quickly picked up the laptops and started the data entry, while the other members of the team quietly started looking at the walls as if it were an art museum. They were trying to pick up the underlying themes. The students quickly completed the data entry exercise, and started presenting that in clusters to the rest of the team. Now all of them sat together, and could pick up six underlying themes from more than two hundred and fifty statements that had got generated. To their surprise, and to the professor's amusement, the themes were very similar to what they had written in the morning. The professor emphasized that it was all about process. Once they have themselves written the statements, they would have greater ownership of the themes the next day when they are working on it. Now the time had come to decide on the proceedings and arrangements for day II.

They decided that on day II they would begin the day with a brief presentation on LSIP as a technique by The Head HR. They would follow it up with an energizer. Thereafter, they would make a brief presentation to the team about the statements that had come up on the walls and the clusters that they had been able to make out of that. Each cluster was converted in to a question. Now the entire team had to be divided in to six groups. All the groups had to work on one question, and then all the groups had to rotate in such manner that each group is able to see the work of the other group and then add their own ideas to that. After this round was over then each group had to make a presentation on that. The only constraint was created that presentations would not be made on transparency sheets, computers, or flip charts, but by skits or parodies. Once the proceedings was decided they quickly prepared the charts for the next day, arranged the moderation cards, and writing instruments in adequate numbers, and decided to call it a day. Before breaking for the day, they took a look at the score sheet, and found as many as seventeen stickers on the sheet "sad" and many more on the sheet "mad." The professor advised them neither to get

mad, nor to be sad on that account. All of them proceeded to take rest. It was already 2 in the night.

All of them retired to their rooms very satisfied with the proceedings of the day I. Now they had to work on day II. Day II started on a very positive note with The Head HR explaining the concept of LSIP to the entire group. This was followed by an energizer that really set the tempo for the day. Now the entire team was divided in to different groups, and they started working on the leading questions that was provided to them. In the first half all the groups worked on three leading questions. By 12noon they had completed the work on the leading questions, and were ready with their suggestions. These suggestions now had to be presented to the rest of the team. They were given an hour's time to prepare their skit or parody for the same and then at 1pm the presentations had to begin. By the time every team was back in the room, the CEO, the COO, and all the Vice Presidents had also reached the venue. They had decided to be available for the rest of the program, viewing the presentations, and participating in the rest of the activities like any other participant. The presentations once they began caught the imagination of all because of the very format that was given. Everybody thoroughly enjoyed while also getting the subtle message behind the skits. Each team was at its creative best. The entire event was video recorded so that no data gets lost.

For the second half the teams were given the other three leading questions. This time the task was the same but the format of the presentation was different. They were given enough writing material, chart papers, newspapers, old magazines, coloring instruments, and were advised to present their suggestions in a collage format, and put up the display of the same in the conference hall. A nominal competition amongst the groups was also announced. By the evening the groups had come up with their collages, and each collage had its own story to tell. The collages were not only aesthetically done, but were also capturing the points very succinctly. All the senior executives, including the CEO had actively participated in the activity. It was decided to organize a dinner party for all the participants that evening so that they could unwind themselves after a long day's intensive work, and now was the time to finalize the final day's activity. In the meanwhile, the students had picked up all the moderation cards used by the different groups to deliberate upon the leading questions, and were quickly doing the required data entry so that all points raised get captured in the repository.

The day III activities were to be planned in accordance with the proceedings of the first two days, and also had to be in accordance with an appropriate plan for a grand finale. On day II at the last count, the best indicator that the facilitators had got of the success of the program, was that now there were very few stickers on the "Mad" sheet, and only two on the "Bad" sheet.

Day III had to drive home all the points, namely,

- The theme had to be reiterated,
- The sincerity of purpose had to be re established.

Accordingly, the core team sat with the professor designing the day III activities.

They decided to go with the method of story telling this time, as this was appropriate for the purposes of wrapping up. The entire team had to begin the day as individuals. They

were to perform the task of writing their own story, any story, on a moderation card, the only condition was that it should be an original story. It could have been written in any format, and could have been written on any subject. They were given 45 minutes for doing that. After that they had to sit in six groups, and were required to carve out a single story out of the 10 to 12 stories available in each group. This activity was to encourage them symbolically to let their own identity merge with the larger identity of the group. After the completion of the group stories all the six group stories were to be read out to the entire team. Thereafter, each team had to nominate a leader, and the leaders with the help of the rest of the participants, identify the underlying themes of all the stories. These themes were identified. 30 such themes emerged. Once these 30 themes had emerged thereafter, the leaders with the support of the rest had to prepare a single story, now merging the group identities in to a single identity. Thus from divergence to convergence was to be achieved symbolically. The leaders performed this task in a very creative manner, and they took examples of films, hotel industry etc. to cover all the themes that had emerged. The story was thus created on a chart paper, and was then amidst much fan fare read out to the entire team by a very senior functionary. Before that a five minutes complete silence was organized so that everyone in the room could reflect on the process and its purpose through the story. The story was then symbolically signed by every one attesting that it was their own story. Meanwhile all the stories were entered in to the database by the students.

With this the program was all but complete. As a symbolic gesture a hand holding exercise, a pledge and a group photography was also done, and the team was now relaxing, realizing that finally the intervention was completed, all the preliminary documentation was done, and to their greatest satisfaction, this time there was no sticker, either on the “Mad” sheet or on the “Sad” sheet.

Key Learnings, Discussion, and Conclusion

One thing that they had clearly realized was that it was only the sound theoretical back up that had held them in good stead. Secondly, they also realized that it was all about experiential learning, not only for the participants but also for the facilitators themselves.

They organized a one-day of site meeting for themselves to reflect over the proceedings, with the aid of all the data that was meticulously entered, all the video footage that they had got, and all the photographs that were taken during the program. In this meeting they started preparing a list of the key learnings:

- It is all about planning, planning, and all the more planning. Planning not only the schedule and design but also planning all the logistics in the greatest possible details. The logistics would include, travel, scheduling, getting dates in advance from all, organizing all the material/ stationery for the moderation during the program, inspection of the venue for its appropriateness, etc.
- In spite of all the planning be ready for the program to evolve, do not become a prisoner of your meticulous planning, things will change, things will remain ambiguous, resources will never be adequate, and you have to make the best of

any situation that emerges, so remain in control, remain in command, but be flexible,

- The messenger is the message, the facilitators have to display a great degree of willingness to change otherwise the message will come in to conflict with the messenger himself, and will end up eroding the credibility,
- Never lose sight of the final objective of the program, all the activities shall be evolved around that,
- Lose all your baggage, never remain imprisoned by your fixed ideas, and past experiences, take advantage of your past experiences but remain willing to change, recognize that each situation is unique, each individual is unique, and each idea is worth examining,
- Involve, design your program in a such a way that it ensures active involvement of all the participants,
- Ensure that visible top management support is there for the intervention,
- Innovate, there are many ways of doing a thing, let people do things in a new way every time,
- Make it Noisy, create a scenario where the energy levels reach a new pitch, where participants remain highly active, talking amongst one another, and discussing things openly,
- Create an environment wherein ideas are freely flowing without fear of reprimand, protect the anonymity, and tolerate to the maximum possible limit,
- Unleash the creativity of the participants, provoke them in to doing things in a new style,
- Seek continuous feedback, your intervention is not important, you are not important, they are important, and they are the most important, (a simple tool of an energy meter was utilized from time to time during the program, and energizers were put in accordingly),
- Create as much secretarial, and technological assistance as possible to collect, enter all the data that gets generated during the program in a cohesive manner, never leave this task for tomorrow.

Having prepared this list they added a few things that they needed to do after the completion of the program. They decided that a small team would be working on all the data that was generated during the program. The team was given a very clear terms of reference. They had to go through the data, cluster all the ideas that had come up, in each cluster they had to define a clearly worded action item that would then have clearly designated owners, and the small team had to work closely with all the owners to ensure a timely completion of the action items, and prepare and circulate amongst all the participants an action taken report on a fortnightly basis. Finally, one more gathering was proposed with the entire team of 100 odd participants for half a day in the next quarter to discuss the actions taken, and to assess the pilgrim's progress.

Suggested Resources/ References.

- Extracts and/ or Summary from page 149, and pages 254 through 262 of “Organization Change and Development” by Cummings and Worley, 7th Edition).
- Leith’s guide to Large Scale Intervention Methods, by Martin Leith, published by the Innovation Agency (2001).
- A Short Manual of Open Space Technology: Compiled by Dr Madhukar Shukla.
- Owen, H. (1992). *Open Space Technology: A User's Guide*. Potomac MD: Abbott Publishing.
- Weisbord, M.R. (1992). *Discovering Common Ground*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Weisbord, M.R. (1987). *Productive Workplaces: Organizing and Managing for Dignity, Meaning, and Community*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

They also collected some web resources. An illustrative is furnished below:

- <http://www.openspacetechnology.com/articles.html> [contains good articles and cases on use of OST]
- <http://www.openspaceworld.org/wiki/wiki/wiki.cgi?OpenSpaceFacilitatorsToolbox> [Huge set of resources for designing and facilitating the OST]
- <http://www.globalchicago.net/wiki/wiki.cgi?OpenSpaceTech> [another comprehensive set of links]