Whole System Transformation:
The Consultant's Role in Creating *Sustainable* Results
Unleashing Extraordinary Performance and Vitality

by

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Anyone who has ever attempted a large-scale planned change initiative knows the disappointing truth of what can happen after you and your consultant colleagues leave the building:

❑ The busy-ness of people's daily work diminishes—or even neutralizes—the changes that were agreed to at the end of the kick-off celebration.

❑ Three months or maybe even three weeks later, leaders and employees alike are thinking—or saying, 'What was *that* all about?'

❑ The 'We-are-changing-everything-around-here' t-shirts, so proudly worn for a while, go back in the dresser drawer as people realize it was not really about changing anything fundamental. Things are pretty much the same, only different.

❑ The bottom line: your change process has 'dropped like a marble in a bowl of oatmeal', making hardly a ripple in the on-going effectiveness and practice of the system.

What happened? Why do so many change projects fail to create lasting transformation in the system that badly needed it—especially when all those involved thought they had created it?

Based on our experience in participating in transformation initiatives with a wide variety of client organizations, we believe there is a clear set of principles that make up a kind of 'recipe' for what we are calling 'sustainable whole system transformation' or WST. In fact, we are so bold as to say that if use these principles, you, in fact, enhance the likelihood of transformation. What you do may feel good and even lead to some change, but it is not likely to result in sustainable whole system transformation with deep, lasting impact on the client organization's processes and people. (The concept 'Whole System Transformation' was coined by Roland Sullivan in 1974. See *Practicing Organization Development*, 2005, 2008, and Dannemiller-Tyson, 2000.)

First, a definition of terms:

What We Mean by 'Sustainable'

By 'sustainable' we do *not* mean changes that remain in place *forever*. This is highly unlikely, regardless of what you do. Life moves on. The world changes. What is right for one moment becomes a drag on the organization later on. Marvin Weisbord, originator and later co-developer with Sandra Janoff of the Future Search methodology for transforming organizations, recently spoke to the authors about sustainability. (See Chapter 22 in his 2004 *Productive Workplaces Revisited*). Weisbord: "'Sustainable transformation' is a philosophical dilemma and an oxymoron, since nothing lasts forever, regardless of the method used. Leaders come and go. There are many variables out of our control or even ability to influence. Pressure from Wall Street or shareholders can demand a return to business-as-usual. We can help people build transformed organizational cultures for *today and maybe tomorrow*, but not for the ages.'

Even though many—or even all—of the specific operational changes set in motion during our WST interventions fade with time, we have often seen that something lasting does 'stick' within the system. Perhaps what is sustainable is *who people become*—effective leaders and unleashed employees—and *what the system learns* about cross-functional teamwork, breakthrough thinking, and about the process of transformation itself. Sometimes a critical mass of people is able to hold on to what Weisbord calls 'the capacity to do things together that everyone values and they could not do alone'.

For us, the 'sustainable' part of whole system transformation means assisting people in the development of a replicable and evolving enterprise-wide capability to transform the way they do things again and again in a chaotic, ever changing world.

What We Mean by 'Whole System'

The scientific worldview held by Chaos theorists and by other thinkers like Margaret Wheatley (1992) and Frijtof Capra (1975), emphasize that we must no longer look at the world as a machine with isolated, separate parts needing to be 'fixed'. Co-author John Scherer uses the image of a *clothesline* to describe a system: 'Pull on the socks and the underwear jumps.' Roland Sullivan likes a *cooking* metaphor: change one thing in a recipe and that changes everything, because all of the ingredients, even the smallest, are interacting with each other in the process of becoming the meal. What happens in one part of a system, no matter how small or isolated it may appear, has an effect on every other part of that system.

We are also not just referring to a system but to a *whole* system, and that additional word is extremely important. Our word 'whole' comes from the Old English root *hool*, which meant healthy, unhurt, entire. 'Whole' therefore, is more than a quantitative word referring

to 'all of something'. It has a *qualitative* sense of a healthy balance, unity, and completeness. When the term 'wholeness' is applied to a system, it refers to the interdependent parts interacting with each other and with the environment as a unified whole, so that a more healthy world is created for that system and its stakeholders.

Whole system transformation goes beyond simply setting in motion changes that affect the entire system. *WST means the whole organization is involved—as a system—in creating itself anew*.

What We Mean by 'Transformation'

There is Change and there is Transformation. *Change* is altering something within the given parameters of the situation, but keeping the fundamentals basically the same, like going faster in first gear. Other examples: changing to a new Performance Management Process, or installing a different Information Technology platform, or sending everyone through a training program. These interventions are often necessary—but they are rarely sufficient to transform an entire system. Something else may be needed. Not 'more-of-the-same-only-different', which is Change, but something *entirely* different. Like shifting into another gear, or even more powerful, leaving your car to use a plane to get where you are headed.

We like the image of the *quantum leap*, which is what happens when an electron makes a shift to another state within an atom. (Zukav, 1979) The actual shift from one 'shell' to the next does not happen gradually over time. It is discontinuous. One moment the atom is in one state with a certain configuration among its electrons; the next instant it is in another state, which dramatically alters the nature of the atom. In the vernacular, 'quantum leap' has come to mean a relatively small 'jump' that makes a huge difference, and happens all at once.

That's what we refer to as Transformation. *Transformation* is a sudden shift that is so profound that the old situation and the way you saw that situation are either left behind or are subsumed into a new way of seeing and doing things. It is actually a new way of *being* that alters the system's relationship to what is happening. Gina Lavery refers to it as the 'birth' of a new view because it can be painful, uncomfortable, messy and unpredictable.

Transformation means 'going back to zero' and re-thinking the fundamental principals and paradigms on which you are basing what you do, and how you do it. When you *make a quantum (transformational) leap*, these things often shift:

- The strategic intention or 'The Big Idea' behind the enterprise.
- The way people work together.
- The sense of accountability and 'ownership' present in the system.

- The way people are led and managed.
- Decision-making and the way conflicts are handled.
- How straight (honest) people are when communicating, especially *up*.

'Change is incremental at best. It is about moving the pieces in a game on the same board or field. *Change* is like putting on a new outfit. *Transformation* is fundamental and structural. It is about changing the game or the board on which we are playing.' (Elee Cost, *Organizing for America* blog, December 12, 2007)

Change is always embedded in transformation, but the opposite is rarely the case.

How WST Processes Usually Begin

In virtually every request for transformation, some or all of the following elements are present:

1. An awareness among a few key leaders that 'things are not working', that there are forces and/or factors at work in the organization's world that must be reckoned with, and that some units—or the entire system—would benefit from breakthroughs that lead to higher levels of effectiveness or performance.

2. Those same leaders have a transformational experience which allows them to see that the normal ways the system addresses situations like this are not likely to work, and that they must take a radically different approach.

3. A senior leader in the system who *sees* or *wants* transformation for the organization, and is well-positioned and willing to be a strong 'champion' in making it happen.

4. The notion that the 'answers' or 'solutions' are already in the system somewhere, rather than existing only in the reports of expert external consultants—or in senior management.

5. The developed leadership core realizes that there is a lot more potential to be actualized.

The WST Macro-Model

Our WST methodology is straightforward and may even look familiar. Here are the basic elements:

1. **Gather data** on the system's culture and functionality of its operations and processes. (Interviews, surveys, observation, public data, etc.)

2. **Share the data** with the senior leader, then the leadership group, facilitating the implication derivation process, where they *see* what is happening and are moved by what they realize it means. (We have found that taking an Appreciative Inquiry approach helps leaders digest tough data, turning problem statements into

energizing descriptions of how it *could* be.)

3. ***Align* the senior leadership group**, powerfully holding a vision of what Ed Lindaman and Ron Lippitt (1979) called a 'preferred future'—and get their unconditional support for what will be required to transform the organization.

4. ***Transform* the leadership core**. Involve the senior leadership team—and other leaders in the system—in a powerful experience that opens them to an experience of transformation, starting with themselves. As people see the example set by the leadership core, this begins to empower the entire system to trust the process and engage in transformation.

5. ***Involve* the entire system** in a minimum of 2 days over 3 days (3 days and 3 nights is better) in 'max-mix' (representative) gatherings to deeply engage in:

   - Dreaming and sharing their vision of a preferred future, and unleashing the spirit of the organization to 'live the vision'. An example of a recent client vision: *'Mobilizing all our economic and human power to thrill the customer.'* (Sometimes mundane, the actual *language* of the vision is not magical; the powerful and profound personal *ownership* of those words is where the transformational power comes from.)
   - Uncovering things that need to change in order to achieve the vision.
   - Deepening the vision in the hearts, minds and spirits of participants, creating robust *action plans* for shifting the organization from its current state to the preferred future state.
   - Small cross-functional teams taking on prioritized breakthrough ideas and converting them into action.

6. ***Connect* and *apply*** the work of the teams to the day-to-day work of the system to ensure the preferred future comes alive in the real world.

7. ***Solicit feedback* continuously** from the system, and adjust what is happening based on what is learned.

Three Ingredients in Sustainability

Ownership

'Getting the whole system in the room' as Weisbord (1987, 2004) has made clear, is the fastest way to transform a system. Once you and the client have figured how best to do that, you must create a strong sense of ownership among all key stakeholders of what happens, including the design of the process, the breakthrough possibilities that get addressed, and the decision-making that finally moves the system in real-world, day-to-day ways.
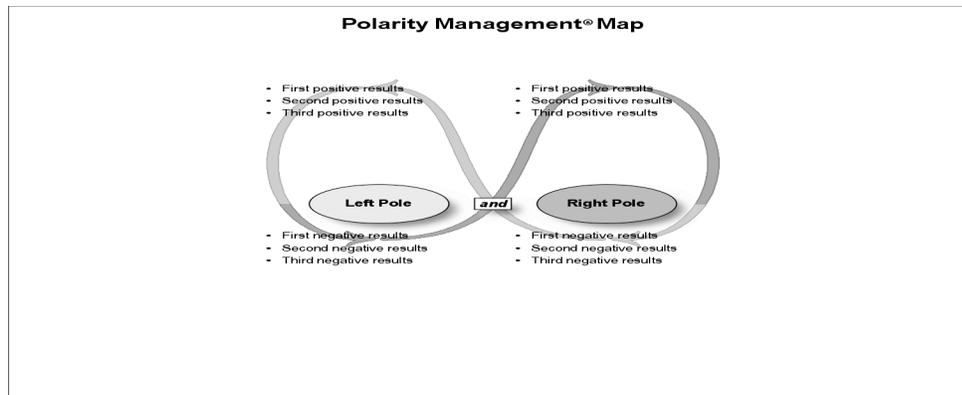
This type of transformation requires everyone in a critical mass to be *very* self-aware and system-oriented, starting at the top of the organization. When the individuals in a system are *self-aware*, they come to see that they need to get beyond their habitual ways of thinking, doing and being. When people are *system-oriented*, they are able to appreciate *all* the stakeholders (including suppliers and customers), not just their department. Combine the two, and everyone involved can see how they relate to each other and to the outside environment, resulting in a healthy system that knows what to do next and is capable of acting quickly.

More important, though, is that their self-awareness enables them to understand how they, themselves, are collectively responsible for what is happening in the current system. This awareness brings a keen understanding that the *system* will not transform until they *personally* transform. When that 'moment' comes, when people clearly see their system-at-work, often like a thunder clap, a whole new range of possibilities emerge, along with the necessary energy and focus to enable them to succeed, now and over time. Experiencing such a newness, like learning to ride a bike, never goes away.

Tapping the Energy of Polarities

Colleague Barry Johnson, creator of Polarity Management (1992), has pointed the authors toward a powerful source of indestructible sustainability that is inherently present in every system: its ability to keep moving through an 'infinity energy loop' that flows around and between two poles (ways of doing things). When a system becomes enamored with one pole, say *change*, to the exclusion of the opposite pole, *stability*, this attachment is guaranteed to bring on a sinking into the downside of the preferred pole. People begin to experience uncertainty and exhaustion and yearn for more stability. If the movement toward stability is resisted, the system gets 'stuck' in a less-than-optimal place, and the natural flow of energy is blocked.

As long as the system continues to move back and forth between these two poles (which are both valid and deserve to have their 'time'), the system is alive and well. Such a system is able to tap the benefits inherent in the unavoidable, constant, infinite energy flow around the polarities. WST empowers that flow.

Polarity Management® Map

- First positive results
- Second positive results
- Third positive results

- First positive results
- Second positive results
- Third positive results

Left Pole   *and*   **Right Pole**

- First negative results
- Second negative results
- Third negative results

- First negative results
- Second negative results
- Third negative results

The Polarity Infinite Energy Loop

Touching Spirits, Hearts and Minds

When a system begins to experience difficulty, the 'trouble' usually manifests 'above-the-waterline' at the operational level, where important numbers begin to fall, like customer satisfaction, market share, revenue, speed to market, etc. However, leaders who understand WST principles realize that the response to falling numbers has to involve shifting the way things are happening 'below-the-waterline', inside and between people and organizational units. They know the long term 'solution' lies in awakening, unleashing, and focusing the spirit of the system. (Scherer, 2009)

'Defining Moments' that Create the Possibility of WST

We have identified a handful of moments in a change initiative that hold great leverage in creating sustainable whole system transformation with clients.

1. WST Starts in the Contracting Conversation.

If you want to do sustainable whole system transformation, you need to be clear and committed to what it takes from the very first interaction with the client. What you are proposing will almost certainly be different from the way the organization and its leaders currently go about things, otherwise they would not be in their situation. It's a natural paradox: leaders need to do things in radically new ways, yet they instinctively protect the status quo and the old ways of working together.

As a result, the client is likely to have an urge to 'negotiate' or remove things from the process that scare them, like allowing front line people to participate in making decisions regarding what to do, or having to experience personal transformation themselves. You must hold your ground and help them see the logical connection between their situation and the breakthrough potential of what you are proposing. WST must not be

allowed to become another leadership flavor-of-the-month that people can 'hunker down and outlast'. Even though the process appears to be a series of events that can be scheduled on a calendar, WST is beyond a program. It's a journey, a new 'way' of working together that never ends. Co-author Gina Lavery likes the metaphor of learning to ride a bicycle: once you have learned how, *you cannot un-learn it*. It is with you forever. As soon as you 'get' the experience of balance, the whole world is different, and you will never go back. Like riding a bike, people cannot un-learn transformation. Once people and the system learn how to be an organization that renews itself, this capability doesn't end, and is so compelling they don't *want* to go back to the way it was before.

2. The Leadership Core Must Experience Transformation First.

After the contracting phase, WST begins with a 'Leadership Alignment Intensive' for the leadership core, where they come to understand transformation by experiencing a personal quantum leap in the way they relate to themselves, to each other, and to the system. Without this deep and often dramatic increase in self-awareness, when the pressure is on, leaders can 'bail out' and abandon the process. (We are referring here not just to '*top* leadership' or '*senior* leadership' but rather the 'leadership core' that exists throughout the system, e.g. union and other informal leaders.)

The primary objective is a leadership core that is aligned around a single intention—the creation of a 'preferred future', developed in collaboration with front line employees, that is more productive and more alive. For this to happen, leaders at every level must be willing to let go of control, trust the process, and share control with their people. At this point, the senior leadership team may not realize what they have agreed to. Transformation is about to rock their world, but without a committed 'thumbs-up' from the senior leadership team, WST is very difficult or impossible to achieve.

WST colleague, Jennifer Todd, puts it this way: 'In hierarchical organizations, the results from WST are made possible by the leadership core's commitment at the heart level and their actively and visibly shifting their behaviors and "way of being" to align with the transformation. The organization will continuously test them to see if they really are willing to do the work themselves personally: "Are they for real this time?" The depth of the personal transformation the leadership team is willing to take on will be proportionate to how much and how deep the front line people will feel safe in going. Leadership has the power to make or break the success of transformation, particularly in it's early stages when the system is still forming itself anew and stepping into its new paradigms.'

There is actually research that suggests a connection between the personal transformation of leaders and business success. In a 1994 Canadian study of 326

organizations by the Toronto Institute of Market-Driven Quality, the primary variable that connected directly to increased *business development* was the deep commitment of leaders to their own learning and personal development. Their conclusion: when the leader grows, the business can grow. Our experience tell us that only a leader who has experienced transformation at the personal and inter-personal levels is capable of leading their people in a WST process.

How do you transform the leadership core? Any of several designs will work here, but our Leadership Alignment Experience usually includes these elements:

❖ Staff: Two external consultants (male and female is best) take the lead, shadowed by (1 or 2) internal people who have been selected to be trained to lead certain aspects of the WST initiative from inside.

❖ The first order of business is to guide the group in identifying tangible business challenges confronting the organization and to feel a common sense of urgency in addressing them. Each member of the leadership core needs to 'own' the system's situation, and commit to the co-creation of breakthroughs via a process of discovery and action carried out with front line people as colleagues.

❖ Leaders need to experience a shift in their relationship with each other so they end up speaking with one voice. They also need to be assisted in what John Scherer calls 'Facing the tiger' (Scherer, 2001), discussing what they need to discuss in ways they have not done before. 'If you are not facing your tigers, they are already eating you.'

❖ One important outcome is experiencing greater trust in themselves, in their leader, in each other, and in the consultants.

A key concept that surfaces at the Leadership Alignment Session is that everything that happens in the up-coming WST initiative must be understood as happening 'in stereo', with attention being paid to both operational (above the waterline) and human factor dimensions (below the waterline). Sustainable transformation occurs when *both* of these domains are acknowledged and addressed. WST is based on this principle.

The leadership core also needs to understand that, rather than the old 'un-freezing, changing and re-freezing' model (Beckhard, 1969), WST is a conscious and continuous un-freezing of the organization so that, like water, it can *flow*. Frozen water is rigid and cannot flow or adapt to changes in the environment. Today there is no room for re-freezing. The older Change Model gives temporary advantages—and a feeling of some control for managers—but it drives the system to repeat the past as soon as things change again, which is happening constantly.

3. A Truly Integrated Team of Internal and External Facilitators

We cannot emphasize enough that, unlike other change management models, *WST is not primarily about the external consultants*. It's about the system transforming itself, led by a small team of capable internal people who are 'joined at the hip' with each other and with the externals. This makes it possible for the process and its results to be 'owned' by all key stakeholders in the system. Without *internal* consultants, the process is unlikely to succeed, as the system becomes dependent on the external resources and fails to learn themselves how to do what is needed. Without *external* people helping to guide, stimulate and inspire what happens, the initiative is less likely to create transformation, since the culture will instinctively try to 'domesticate' the process and its output, 'taming it down' to fit within existing paradigms.

In many traditional planned change models, the initiative is managed by a small (or very large) team of external consultants, working closely with top leadership. There may be a small group of internal people appointed to 'work with the consultants', but everyone knows they have little or no influence over what happens. In WST, this pattern is reversed. People soon realize that what happens is being obviously planned and carried out by internal people, trained and assisted by a small team of external consultants who are experienced in WST. This is how the work gets divided in a typical WST initiative:

Carried Out by External Consultants Alone:

❖ Managing the initial contracting conversations with the client.

❖ Initial briefing and coaching of the WST Sponsor.

❖ Modeling transformation for everyone else, e.g. letting go of control and sharing the limelight with others.

❖ Creating the initial design for the Leadership Core and their subsequent transformation experiences.

❖ Guiding the Transformation Management Team's (TMT) work.

❖ From time to time, outside content experts nay be invited in to address the gatherings and provide a context for transformation, e.g. an industry expert or someone experienced with a particular issue being addressed.

Carried Out by Internal Resources Alone:

❖ *Intelligence and recon.* This means serving as 'eyes and ears' of the team, asking their sources around the organization what the 'buzz' is about the process. Alerting the external consultants to political 'landmines' and other hidden hazards to be avoided.

❖ *Communicating*. Sharing up-dates on what is happening via internal communications like newsletters, emails, strategic conversations, etc.).

❖ *Coordinating*. Managing sub-teams handling scheduling, making sure the right

people are included in all phases, logistics and other matters.

- ❖ *Connecting* and *aligning* all existing change efforts 'under the WST tent', building bridges to other improvement initiatives that are underway to ensure they do not interfere with each other and generate synergy wherever possible.
- ❖ *Linking to history and reality.* Helping externals understand where the organization has been, and ensuring that what is planned is connected with the daily life of the organization.
- ❖ *Facilitating as possible*. The intent is for the external experts to train and empower the internal TMT to lead as much of the process as possible, depending on their level of competence and confidence.

Carried Out by Both, Working Together:

- ❖ Designing and facilitating the Leadership Alignment and Transformation Experiences (again depending on the skill and experience of the Internals on the TMT).
- ❖ Helping to facilitate the Whole-System-in-the-Room experiences.
- ❖ Facilitation of TMT planning and debriefing meetings.
- ❖ Guiding the selection of who needs to be included in the process—and how.

4. Shared Power and Decision-Making

Radical in the 1950's when it was introduced, our OD ancestors invented what they called 'planned change', where front line performers were invited by top management into a process that generated ideas for improving things, which then went back to top management for consideration. (See Lippitt, et al, 1958, and Beckhard, 1969.) This approach was picked up by large consulting firms and dubbed 'change management'. Unlike the application of planned change by our OD ancestors, which involved front line employees, these top-down, consultant-driven 'change management' programs sold to so many corporations simply have not worked. Research indicates that upwards of 75% of such initiatives 'fail'. Successful WST is less about imposing change on an organization from *above* (management-driven change) or from *outside* (consultant-driven change), than it is about enabling and empowering the system to transform itself.

In WST, there is a blurring of the line between who is a) identifying areas that need work and thinking up ideas for action, and who is b) deciding what gets done. In WST, managers join front line performers in developing breakthrough ideas, and front line performers join managers in making decisions. As consulting colleague Bob Kline puts it: 'Rational management thinking must still be prized, but it alone simply cannot provide the *energy* needed for the long march that is transformation. What is needed is an empowered system where the empowerment does not come solely from the benevolence of positional

authority, but also from a genuine sense of shared commitment to take initiative and be accountable for reaching larger goals.' (Personal communication.)

Everyone involved, especially senior leaders and the consultants, both internal and external, need to practice what Buddhists call 'passionate non-attachment'. This means investing your all yet being willing to live in the 'muck' of ambiguity and allowing a new organization and a new way of working to unfold. Transformation is not only a quantum leap. It is, as the current (millennial) generation might say, a 'jump of faith'. 'They just get it! It's as if they have been waiting for this all along!' is how co-author Gina Lavery describes what happens.

While consultants can facilitate and create a safe 'container' that allows for WST, no one can force transformation to happen. Acts of force stop the natural evolutionary process of *discovery*. This requires a great deal of responsible and responsive leadership with a strong trust in both people and process.

At a well-designed WST event, you will not see the external consultants dominating the process from the front of the room with their magic markers and PowerPoint slides. What you will see are internal people from across the organization and from many levels working with the externals in guiding the agenda. For many external consultants, this kind of 'letting go' is almost unthinkable. 'What happens if they mess up?!' is the rationale for taking charge. In the service of creating greater ownership—and therefore greater sustainability—it is more important for people in the system to see 'their own' leading than it is to have everything absolutely perfect. In those places where the internal team cannot be trained to handle a crucial aspect of the agenda, the external consultants step forward. What a powerful signal this sends to the system—and to leaders—who all have a chance to see their people in a more powerful, responsible and surprising way. 'Wow! I never knew our people cared so much, or were so smart about our situation!' is the way one CEO put it recently.

5. Getting the Whole System in the Room.

Somehow you must find a way to 'get the system in the room'. (Weisbord, 1997, 2004) In a small organization that is able shut down for three days, you could gather the entire system and do it in one go. This is rarely possible, so alternative methods must be created. One approach we use often is bringing together cross-functional, quasi-representative groups of from 64 to 2,000 people for that three-day/three-evening off-site, and repeating the process to ensure the involvement of everyone in the system.

You will almost always get 'push-back' on the three-day off-site requirement. 'Can't we do what we need to do in a half-day?' a client may ask. The answer is, 'Not if you truly

desire to create sustainable transformation.' The optimum schedule starts at 6:00 PM on Day 1 and ends at around 1:00 PM on Day 4. Given how long the system has been 'perfecting' what it is doing now (that is not working), three days of hard work seems a small price to pay to create a quantum leap.

A typical WST Intensive event for the whole system will usually include these kinds of elements in the agenda:

- ❖ *Setting the context:* The CEO says, 'We are here because we need to. . .'
- ❖ *Acknowledging history:* 'We will be building a new structure on the old foundation, which includes. . .'
- ❖ *Ventilation:* People get a chance to complain about the way things are. 'Complaints are actually stuck energy patterns. Underneath the complaint is an undeclared commitment, and a whole lot of energy yearning to be released.' (Gina Lavery). In an appreciative inquiry model of WST, complaints get converted into what is working well and what can be learned from these successes.
- ❖ *Visioning:* Everyone is involved in a process to generate words that have compelling power and heart for them and the organization.
- ❖ *Moving forward:* 'What do we want to **Hold On To**, **Let Go Of**, and **Learn or Develop** in order to move toward that vision.'
- ❖ *Action and Heart-Felt Commitment* (at the level of the individual, department, inter-department, whole system, and customer): Cross-functional, 'stakeholder-rich' Breakthrough Teams formed and tasked.
- ❖ *Send-Off* by CEO and TMT Members.

6. Tracking and Reporting Results

Participants go back to their organization fired up and focused on specific tasks that are directly connected with creating performance breakthroughs: new operational procedures, processes and people systems. It is imperative to track these initiatives in terms of real-world business results, which is, after all, the main reason for the WST effort. Measuring and reporting results using the system's own hard numbers provides ongoing impetus and validity to the WST process as people see how their efforts are making a difference in the real world. 'Hey, this is working!'

Years of research by Tor Dahl, past Chairman Emeritus of the World Confederation of Productivity Science, reveals when people share information and experience about performance improvement potential they agree that 92% of current production could be improved by redeploying resources for better purposes. About half of these freed resources are used to expand what the organization does better, cheaper or faster than the

competition—the other half is used to produce what no other company can do. When this is implemented, 100:1 returns to the bottom line occur routinely, customer satisfaction increases dramatically, as does staff satisfaction.

7. Staying the course.

Transformation usually happens both within an individual and an organization in a 'thunder clap' moment, but it doesn't stop there. In fact, when a quantum leap occurs in an organization's way of operating, learning and adapting, transformation continues indefinitely, punctuated by times of stability and times of change. (Remember the infinite energy loop of Polarity Management.) Once WST is initiated, the system must engage in many smaller change initiatives inside the larger transformational context that has been created. *Now* things like training and performance management and new procedures make sense, and connect directly to the bottom line. These change projects will become the focus of attention until the system realizes that it needs to once again engage in transformation, enabling the system's energy to continue to flow. As one of our clients said about a recent WST initiative, 'It's important to see this as a new way of being rather than a program with an end. Even after two years, we're still on the journey. I suspect that transformation *is* our new state of being.'

Here's a word to the wise from Jennifer Todd about taking an organization on the WST journey: 'As a leader or consultant, if you are considering taking on WST for your organization, get ready for a ride. If your heart is open, this process will pierce you in unimaginable ways. You will experience the real pain of generations and cries for relief from thousands of people who have worked and worked in difficult, even impossible, situations. You will also have the honor of seeing the heart and soul of your organization emerge as the true desires, creativity, power and passion of people gets unleashed. And will the while you will be wrestling with yourself—the shifts and changes in your own head and heart as you go through your own transformation. This WST process is hugely challenging, invigorating, and deeply rewarding. If you are leading it and truly experiencing it, *you don't get a hall pass.* It guarantees to change you from the inside out.'

In Conclusion

We believe WST is a concept whose moment has arrived. It doesn't take that much more *time* or *effort* to carry out. It does require a major shift in the *attitude*, *courage* and *authenticity* of the consultant, because as the Great Teachers have said over the centuries, 'You can't take people where you haven't been yourself.' WST cannot be led by a consultant who has not experienced—and who does not continue to experience—transformation in their

life and their practice.

As opposed to the traditional planned change approach, WST accomplishes what is needed by most organizations today that require significant shifts in the way they do their work in the real world. Planned change is popular in part because of the amount of control exercised by top management in such an incremental process and the sense of safety that comes with it. Ironically, it is that same attachment to safety and control by top management that prevents the effort from leading to the extraordinary results they seek, primarily because it has not connected with the human spirit. *Unleashing the spirit of an organization to create performance breakthroughs is what WST is all about.*

John Parker, Executive Sponsor of WST from a highly-successful company committed to 'thrilling the customer', sums it up this way: 'Whole System Transformation fosters deep change. It requires personal transformation on everyone's part. It also requires courage to take an organization through this type of change. The impacts are extraordinary, one of which is the expanded capability for change in the organization. The employee engagement that results is an unbelievable thing to see and feel. It is worth it! It is hard work, emotional, draining, and miraculous! It is magic! And yes, very rewarding.'

What our world needs now is organizations and institutions that know how to continue to adapt and learn how to be whole systems that are continually transforming. And that requires more consultants who can do what we have attempted to lay out here: sustainable whole system transformation.

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