

Constantly Trying to Adapt to Change? Why Not Change to be Adaptive?

The Participative Design Approach

- Ford Motor Company slashed the time from engine concept to prototype from two years to just 100 days, which helped cut new model development time from 60 to 24 months. Ford Chairman Alex Trotman credits the plant's move to self-managing work groups.
- A division of another Fortune 100 manufacturer set production schedules 50% higher after creating work redesign and employee involvement teams.
- Another manufacturer decreased product cycle time from 6 weeks to 2 days through employee involvement, self-directed work teams, cross training, role redesign.
- A Big Six accounting firm revamped a good part of its consulting division's Client Training and Development Center through Participative Design. Multi-skilled, self-managed teams meet increasing demands flawlessly with fewer people
- Teachers designed their own school. The Key School in Indianapolis was founded in 1987 by a group of eight teachers and is cited as one of the nation's "ten outstanding elementary schools."

These are only a few of the advances realized by some organizations after implementing elements of the Participative Design (PD) approach.

Participative Design is a methodology for work (re) design developed by the Australian social scientists Fred and Merrelyn Emery and has proven its effectiveness in many countries around the world. It enables organizations to redesign themselves rapidly and cost effectively through the involvement of the people whose jobs need to change.

The vehicle to do the redesign is called the Participative Design Workshop (PDW). With clearly understood design principles and simple tools to analyze their situation, natural work groups can redesign themselves in three days. An entire organization should not take longer than a few weeks.

**The outcome is a highly flexible, adaptive organization,
made up of multi-skilled, self-managing work groups, with the capacity
to continuously "learn" itself into new solutions.**

PD Makes Common Sense

Managers today are asked to turn their organizations around on a dime, to make them more flexible and adaptive, competitive and profitable in a rapidly changing world. If you are faced with the challenge of redesigning your workplace and are struggling with issues around time, cost and the commitment of employees, PD has much to offer.

Most work redesign strategies today impose expert solutions on the organization and often take months just to do the data gathering and diagnostics. A select team of internal and external experts extract data, detailing every measure of input, output, workflow, reporting relationships and social conditions.

Of course, the people who already know all of that are the people who work there! Moreover, they already have ideas, and in many cases strong views, as to how their work sections can be changed for the benefit of themselves, their peers, and the enterprise as a whole. By pooling their initiatives for change, they themselves can redesign their workplace.

Having people participate in the design of their own work establishes that every person, from the president to the front-line employee, can be a researcher, learner, teacher and resource.

What Motivates People to Do Excellent Work?

More than 30 years of social science research around the world on what motivates people in their work, has identified a number of important requirements for productive activity. When work conditions are favorable and meet these requirements, productivity, quality and people's well-being soar. These requirements address task issues and social climate as follows:

1. Adequate Elbow Room for Decision Making. The sense that, with the exception of specific circumstances, people don't have to ask permission to make responsible decisions that influence their own work. They feel fully empowered without becoming disoriented.
2. Opportunity to Learn Continually on the Job. Learning requires that people set challenging, yet realistic, goals for themselves and get specific feedback in time to adjust final results.
3. An Optimum Level of Variety. Through the avoidance of boredom and overload, people can gain the best advantages from settling into a satisfying rhythm of work.
4. Mutual Support and Respect. Asking and offering assistance is both accepted and encouraged and people are valued for what they do, how they do it, and a willingness to learn more.
5. Meaningfulness. An understanding of the whole product or service being delivered and a sense that one's own work adds value -- to the work process and to society in general. Many jobs lack meaningfulness, because they allow workers only the most local view of the process.
6. A Desirable Future. A career path which will allow personal growth and increase in skills -- not a dead-end job.

The Solution Lies in the Structure of Work

The obvious question is: "How can we meet today's business objectives and integrate the core requirements for productive activity into our work setting?" The answer is the Participative Design approach.

Radically different from any other (re) design method, PD traces problems around productivity, quality, and motivation straight to the core of the organization's structure. It distinguishes two design principles which have far-reaching consequences with regard to the organization's ability to:

- Maintain coordinated and focused efforts
- Flex and adapt to demands and opportunities presented by its environment
- Challenge and motivate its people to do excellent work and grow the business

Design Principle-1 (DP-1): Redundant Parts

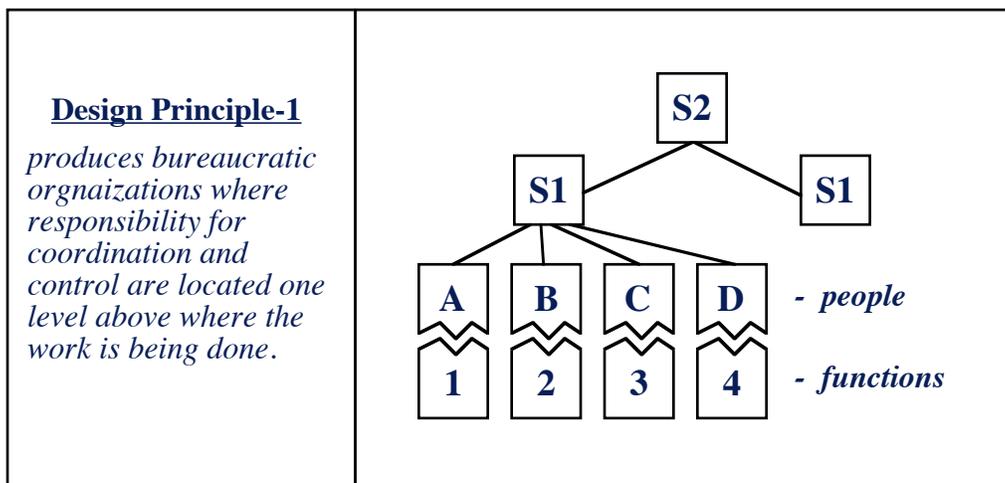
In order for the organization to respond adequately to market demand, they need to behave flexibly and adaptively. This behavior is only possible through some degree of redundancy.

One long-held belief, and a basic way of building this into our work, is by maintaining redundant (spare) parts. With each part replaceable, as one part fails, another is plugged in.

An extreme example is the traditional assembly line, where workers are but human extensions of the equipment they operate. The tasks are reduced to the smallest, simplest pieces, so that when one worker drops out, another worker (replacement part) can be plugged in and brought up to speed quickly.

Through its focus on tasks the traditional organization is made up of narrowly skilled, replaceable people whose work is closely controlled and coordinated by supervisors one step above the work.

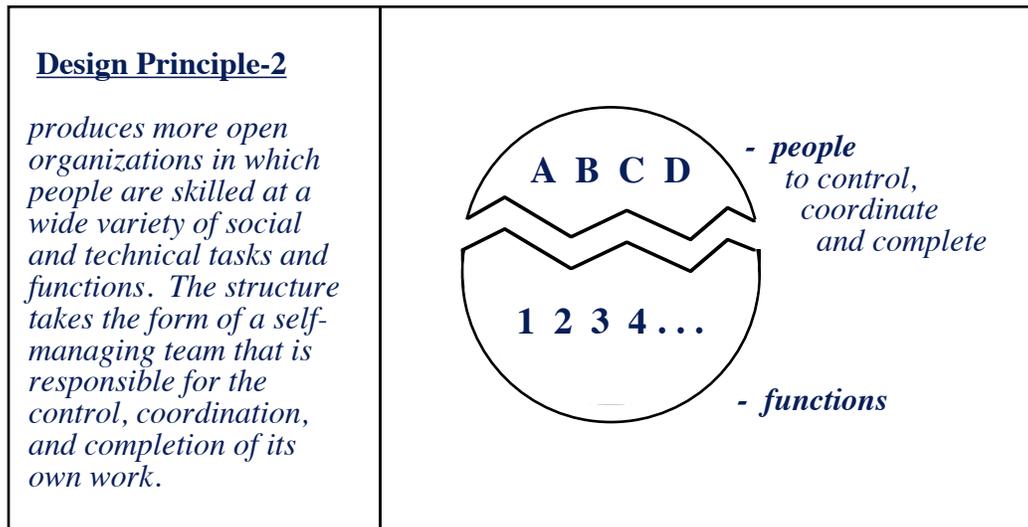
A DP-1 organization, by its nature, limits the development of all six core conditions required for productive activity.



Design Principle Two (DP-2): Redundant Functions

By adding extra functions to each operating part, employees broaden their roles outside of strict job classifications. Having members skilled in a wide variety of social and technical tasks, makes it much easier for work groups to respond to changes in market conditions, customer demands, resource supplies and other variables affecting the organization.

In self-managing work groups, people learn many functions and share responsibility for accomplishing a larger set of tasks. They also can take responsibility for determining what additional skills the group needs to acquire to be even more productive and responsive.



Self-managed groups can operate on a variety of levels. They can operate as an intact team running a unit as a small business, as a cross-functional team with the participation of customers and suppliers (internal and/or external), or as a collaborative venture with other groups or organizations.

Some specific organizational needs that self-managed groups handle well include:

- Maintaining customer satisfaction
- Managing quality and productivity
- Development and management of budgets
- Design of work process and flow
- Scheduling of work
- Layout of workplace
- Hiring decisions
- Peer reviews

In Participative Design, the process of learning becomes as important as the resulting organizational solutions . . .

. . . and the whole organization changes to become more adaptive.

Participative Design Supports Other Initiatives

The adaptive work structures developed by workers in Participative Design Workshops are consistent with:

Multi-Skilling	Total Quality Management
High-Performance Teams	Continuous Learning
Continuous Improvement	Cross-Training
Effective Communication	Pay-for-Skills

Furthermore, because people take responsibility for control and coordination toward explicit shared goals, the structures attenuate for differences in personal style, race, ethnicity, language, etc.

The Participative Design Process

Participative Design Workshops involve as many workers from an organization or section as possible, usually in groups of 24-36 people, who work in small groups of six to eight. The number, structure, and functional/seniority mix of workshops are determined based on the business needs and logistical requirements of each situation.

A single workshop (for 24-36 people) typically takes place over 2-3 days. If shorter (partial) or multiple workshop sessions are required, they are scheduled as close together as logistically possible, in order to maintain focus and momentum. When multiple workshops are required, a final integration workshop is used to merge the best parts of multiple designs into a single best design.

Although a significant amount of learning takes place in the workshops, Participative Design is not training. Everything that happens before and during a Participative Design Workshop is real work aimed at:

Motivating Group Productivity
Improving Customer Satisfaction, and
Increasing Investor Returns

The planning process focuses on real business needs, management priorities and parameters, and the logistics of fitting the redesign work into already busy work schedules. During the sessions, participants analyze their work, design new, adaptive structures, and plan in detail the action steps required to implement their designs.

A single Participative Design Workshop usually includes the following parts:

Analysis of Work

Briefing I - a short explanation of the bureaucratic organizational structure, including a definition and examples of problems and stresses it creates.

Productivity Motivators - small groups work to generate and analyze data on the core requirements for motivating productive work.

Essential Skills - small groups work to list the essential skills required to do their work, identify what skills the group already has, and what additional skills are needed.

Structural Redesign

Briefing II - a short explanation of adaptive or self-managing structures, including definitions, examples, benefits, boundaries and limits, etc.

Workflow - groups work to create a single, complete map of how work gets done.

Existing Structure - each small group works to diagram the current organization structure.

New Structure - small groups redesign and redraw their organization structure into adaptive self-managing, self-motivating groups, capable of maintaining the best possible work situation for all employees. This process is actively supported by Workshop managers.

Implementation

Briefing III - What else is required to make this new structure work?

Goals - measurable and comprehensive for production, human, social responsibility, and other appropriate areas, to be negotiated with management.

Training requirements - driven by earlier work on matrix of essential skills held/required.

Other logistical needs - including equipment, regular meetings, work process innovations, communication of new designs to rest of organization, etc.

Career path/compensation - as appropriate, participants have initial input into creating compensation and promotion system that will support the new adaptive structures.

Start-up date - defines the transition period explicitly and focuses transition work.

Expected improvements in six requirements for intrinsically motivating and productive work, first analyzed at start.

Participative Design Gets People Moving

- Coming together to do real work in a motivating, self-managed environment.
- Learning by experience how self-management can raise motivation and productivity.
- Completing new structural designs for doing their work in coordinated, self-managing, self-motivating teams.
- Establishing and committing to an explicit schedule of actions required to implement the new designs on the scheduled start-up date.
- Learning by experience, powerful tools for continually adapting their work structures to best satisfy ever-changing market, regulatory, organizational and personal needs.
- Participating in a carefully structured, rapidly implemented, needs-driven, organization- or section-wide effort to increase motivation, satisfaction and productivity.