



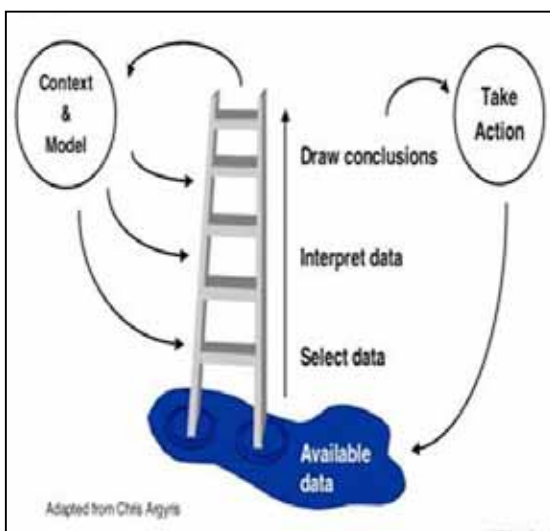
2007-2008 Donella Meadows Leadership Fellows Workshop 2: Deepening February 24 – 28, 2008 Cobb Hill Cohousing, Hartland, Vermont

As the third cohort gathered for their second workshop the scene surrounding Cobb Hill had changed dramatically since their October visit. Instead of the rich colors of gold, orange and red of fall foliage a blanket of white snow covered the landscape. The transformed winter scenery was an exciting new experience for some while to others accustomed to colder climates it was typical winter. Either way the snowy scenery provided a beautiful background to the theme of this workshop: deepening.

This workshop aimed to deepen the Fellows' foundation in systems thinking, vision and reflective conversation through hands-on use and practice over the four-day period. The first day Fellows dove into the material with Peter Senge, the workshop guest speaker and author of The Fifth Discipline. Peter provided insight into how to focus on what we truly want to create as opposed to what we fight against, the core principles of reflective conversation, and lessons of a systems perspective. His personal thoughts on the leadership necessary to address climate change provided Fellows with inspiring words of wisdom from a leader in the field of organizational learning for sustainability.



Guest Speaker Peter Senge



The Ladder of Inference

From the field of organizational learning we have adapted reflective conversation as one of the three primary approaches of the Fellowship. Fellows learn to conduct conversations in a manner where data and assumptions are openly shared and mental models are surfaced in a way that builds joint understanding and leads to effective action. Workshop 1 focused on using reflection and inquiry while Workshop 2 introduced the use of effective advocacy. Advocacy in this context is when we lay out our reasoning and thinking in a way that invites others to challenge us and help us learn. Fellows practiced using the ladder of inference to organize their thoughts into categories of observations, interpretations, assumptions and conclusions to sharpen their advocacy skills.

Deepening the Fellows' understanding of systems thinking focused on four main themes:

- Success can explode
- Systems can push back
- Healthy systems have strong timely feedback
- Accumulations



Mapping Causal Loop Diagrams

Success can explode explored the theory of reinforcing loops which create exponential growth and give the system the potential for growth overall. The power of reinforcing loops can be damaging as in the case of the demands of growing population and consumption of natural resources, or beneficial as has been experienced with renewable energy installations. By applying the theory of reinforcing loops to their work, Fellows brainstormed ways where their efforts can trigger reactions in a wider system that sustains the positive effects of their actions (e.g., developing an effort that provides a small result that “snowballs” into large results).

Systems can push back focused on the effects of balancing loops, in which an effort triggers something in the system that counteracts the desired change. The ability to identify potential balancing loops within the system when working toward sustainability is crucial in order to optimize limited resources, time and energy.

Healthy systems have strong timely feedback articulated the ability and/or potential for systems to keep in check runaway growth and the regulating influence of balancing loops. The combination of reinforcing and balancing loops enables some systems, especially living systems, to maintain a certain growth or balance that contribute to their sustainability through time.

Accumulations addressed slow changing trends, underlying issues that have defied improvement in a system. These factors are slow-changing and have tremendous impact on the system overall but their change over time is not readily visible. Examples included the prevalence of diabetes, our expectations for water quality, national debt, and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. These factors require creative and transformative interventions in systemic structure such as changing incentives, goals, information flows, and mindsets in order to ensure progress.



Justin and Danielle

To practice the discipline of vision, exercises, coaching and group work were designed to enhance each Fellow's ability to articulate their vision for their work while at the same time positioning each of them to take the next steps to begin realizing these aspirations. Each morning six Fellows and staff gave a two-minute presentation of their vision of sustainability to the entire group. Visions varied from descriptions of success in current projects, to lifelong personal and career goals to visions of an overall sustainable world. The presentations shed light on the tremendous sense of possibility felt within the room, and provided an opportunity for presenters to speak from the heart and engage a safe and open group with their vision. In addition, the group was led in a new exercise that experimented with the power of embodying

vision through yoga. Fellows were led through poses that enabled them to embody various attributes that represented ways of being in service of their visions. Poses fostered characteristics such as balance, focus, courage, vulnerability, self-care, listening and self-acceptance and provided a vivid image and physical stance connecting each person to the attribute they desire to embody.



Discussing the latest science of Climate Change over lunch

Finally, there were several sessions of group coaching. These provided Fellows with an opportunity to explore and receive coaching from their peers on their biggest learning and leadership challenges, leading to discovery of their next action steps within their own work. Fellows also practiced effective coaching and support of their colleagues.



Enjoying the snow after dinner and dancing

By the end of the fourth day, it was clear that the group had formed an even stronger bond as a result of their openness and presence. The workshop was an eventful time that included stretching comfort zones through a ritual in despair, joyous celebrations of promotions, new jobs and successes with dancing and singing, sharing data and knowledge of the reality of climate change, and collaborating to give birth to new ideas and projects. With friendships and knowledge deepened the workshop came to a close in anticipation for the next time together at Workshop 3 in July when the snow will be long gone and the lush growing season in full bloom.

Sustainability Institute

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