

# An Experiment With Organizational Change

*An executive summary of K. Daley's 2002 Master's Project*

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## **Overview**

The Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences has been an important part of the Western New York tapestry since 1861. The society, now known as the Buffalo Museum of Science, found a permanent home on Humboldt Parkway in 1929. This vessel for scientific exploration is housed in a looming granite building, easily identified from Buffalo's main thoroughfare by its fourth floor observatory, coated by time with light green. Within its walls one can find mummies, fossils and an Alaskan bear, famous among locals, standing 8'3" tall that is, curiously, missing his ears.

On November 1, 2001, the museum fell into a state of crisis. Facing a \$400,000 deficit and 20% decrease in attendance, the museum let go 25% of its work force. The director called on the services of an organizational coach to lead a select number of staff through a change initiative that would result in a decision-making framework based on the identified values of the museum. I had the opportunity to document this change initiative from January 2002 through May 2002.

## **Pertinent Background Information**

### **The Change Model**

The model used for this particular change initiative was Companies Are People, Too. This title is that of the consulting firm that developed the model, the accompanying assessment tool and the model itself. The model is a conglomerate of many popular theories from the realm of organizational psychology. The theoretical antecedents can be traced to Carl Jung, who first developed the 16 possible personality combinations based on the continuums of introversion-extroversion, sensing-intuition, thinking-feeling, and

judgment-perception. The mother-daughter team Katherine Myers and Isabella Briggs developed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, an assessment tool for the 16 personality types that determined one's personality preferences. William Bridges, in his 1993 book *The Character of Organizations: Using Jungian type in organizational development* described how businesses could use the personality profiles to identify the personality of the organization, thus being able to easily identify strengths and weaknesses. Sandra Fekete, with a team of individuals, created an assessment tool in 1996 that identified an employee's personality as well as the personality of the organization with which that person is employed. The results of this assessment were then used in combination with the theories of Collin and Porras from their 1997 book, *Built to Last*, to create a decision making framework based on the current and desired values of the institution (<http://www.companiesarepeopletoo.com>).

### **The Process**

The directors of the museum, with the assistance of the organizational coach, selected 23 individuals to participate in a series of four workshops that would lead to the development of the decision-making framework. These individuals represented all departments and levels of experience with the museum, including new hires and 20-30 year veterans. Approximately 8 members of this group, called the Steering Committee, were responsible for the dissemination of knowledge, completed through informational meetings called "Widening the Dialogue" sessions, to the rest of the staff. The first workshop was a debrief of the personality assessment. The second through fourth workshops focused on the creation of the framework. A fifth workshop was added to prepare the framework for implementation.

## **Methods**

The questions that guided this research were:

- How is change facilitated within an established institution?
- How is change accepted within an established institution?
- What barriers exist when implementing change?
- How has the change initiative impacted the museum to date?

Data was collected through a series of observations, surveys and interviews. I observed all of the workshops excluding the first. This was because permission to conduct this research had not yet been granted. All staff members received a survey at the beginning of my research and at the end. The director of the museum and the organizational coach were interviewed at the beginning and end of the research initiative. A sample number of staff, consisting of 5 workshop participants and 5 general staff members, were interviewed after workshops 3 and 4. One Widening the Dialogue session after workshop 3 and two sessions after workshop 4 were also observed.

## **Findings**

There were two major relationships that had impact on the creation of and acceptance of the final draft of the decision-making framework. These two relationships were the organizational coach with the workshop participants and the workshop participants with the rest of the staff.

### **The Organizational Coach and the Workshop Participants**

There were many positive aspects of this relationship. The organizational coach had a history of working with museums, which build confidence from the perspective of the participants in his understanding of the museum's situation. He was well versed in

the model and stood firm on how the framework would be created. He used both small group and large group formats and provided opportunities for staff to voice their opinions. He used examples to explain the development of certain parts of the framework.

There were also a few concerns that arose throughout the development of the framework. The organizational coach allowed for a few individuals to continually dominate large group discussions. When it came time to converge, he only recorded the opinions of certain individuals and did not check for consensus before he would record the responses. This led some individuals in the room to believe that their opinion did not carry as much weight as others, which in turn led to decreased participation from some of the workshop participants.

Each workshop began with a discussion of what the rest of the staff were saying in regard to the framework. This was usually led by those that led Widening the Dialogue sessions. Compliments and concerns alike were shared. The concerns, though, were never addressed. The framework was never revisited for adjustment if questions arose pertaining to its accuracy. Commitment to the framework was very important, but lack of flexibility in its development proved to be a downfall.

### **The Workshop Participants and the Rest of the Staff**

The primary relationship between the workshop participants and the rest of the staff, regarding the framework, occurred during the Widening the Dialogue sessions. Teams of two would lead each session in order to give staff an opportunity to learn about the framework and its development. These sessions were taught peer to peer, creating a comfort level between presenter and attendee. Each team of presenters planned their

session independent of the other teams. Thus, the information shared at each session was based on the interpretation and perspective of that particular team. There was a lack of consistency in regard to the information taught to the rest of the staff.

The workshop participants as a whole affected the general staff by the way the workshops were discussed on a day to day basis. Interviews with general staff members revealed that heavy sighs and eye rolls would precede some of the workshop participants' journeys to the room in which the workshops were held.

The final framework is a loosely connected list of the museum's current and desired values. It has the potential to be an effective guide for decision-making. Thus far, pieces of the framework have positively influenced decision-making on an individual level. When the framework is used as a consistent set of criteria to judge museum-wide decisions, it is proving to be too flexible, unable to provide a clear cut yes or no response. In order for successful implementation of the framework to continue, individual uses of the framework should be identified, publicized and rewarded. The shortcomings of the framework can then be identified and addressed. This tool can then reach its full potential as the basis of decision making at the Buffalo Museum of Science.

### References

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