

Learning from Large Scale Interventions

Research to improve the engagement of stakeholders for learning across boundaries
(Detailed description of a learning exchange)

Theme

Large Scale Interventions (or Whole Systems Change or Whole Systems Work) form an approach in which stakeholders are engaged in a collective process of change and learning, to address challenging issues. A large diversity of methods (e.g. Future Search, Search Conference, Open Space, Real Time Strategic Change, World Café) is used to work with “the whole system in the room”. Those methods form the Large Group Interventions family.

In many books and articles about Large Scale Interventions (LSI) practitioners describe the success of LSI for collective learning and organizing across boundaries of organizations and disciplines. However, in my own experience as a facilitator of LSI, and as a coach for consultants who want to practice LSI, there are some serious pitfalls along the way. It is not an easy task to match design and conditions, or to establish sustainable effects. Leaders have to be ready for this approach, the profits have to be worth the effort. Consultants have to let go of their expert attitude.

Studying a substantial number of sources I found little report of thoroughly research evaluating the effectiveness in relation to the working elements. Most of the evaluations focus on the Large Group events, only few concern the sustainable results *after* the events. With more and more consultants and facilitators using Large Group methods in a whole system approach the need grows for more insight in conditions and results, in the light of the efforts made.

Context of the research lab

This lab is an essential element in the research process for my PhD research, which is part of a research tradition on participative methodologies of the Department of Organization Studies of Tilburg University in the Netherlands. The research aims at gaining more insight in the effects, conditions and working elements of participative change with LSI.

The research has the form of a field study with an iterative design process. The experiences and results of each step determine to a high degree the content of the next steps. The table at the end of this proposal gives an overview of the current design of the field study. The parts addressed in this session are highlighted.

Questions we address in this session:

- What can Large Scale Interventions contribute to productive change and learning across boundaries of organizations and disciplines?
- What are valid measures/observables to evaluate sustainable effects, e.g. collective learning?
- How can scholarly research contribute to more insight in conditions for success?
- How can these insights contribute to “Bridging the Gulf”?

Format of the session

The session has four different parts:

1. The story of the research. A short introduction (about 15 min.) of questions and challenges. Participants sit at tables with 4 - 6 persons, the session leader tells the story.
2. Treasure digging: In three rounds we exchange experiences, discuss the questions, and write treasures found on large post-its.
3. Mapping the treasures: Participants present their most important treasures and stick their post-its on a relevant spot on the map.
4. Harvesting: Looking at the map together, what do we see? What are the highlights of this session? We register the conclusions and remarks on flip charts.

Why should you attend?

The lab results in a large map with treasures that are crucial for further insight in sustainable effects and conditions for success of LSI. We share insights in how the use of LSI can be improved to realize collective learning across boundaries.

Every participant will receive a report of this lab, with photos of the session, treasure map and flip charts. If participants approve I will make a recording of this meeting with a voice recorder.

Follow up

Participants who are interested in the next steps of the field study, or want to participate (in whatever way), can sign in for further actions on the spot, or contact me later.

Possibilities for further participation in the field study:

- short interview
- in-depth interview
- participate in an internet survey
- share information: articles, book titles, research papers, contacts
- sponsoring or bring in leads for sponsors
- potential LSI-trajectories for the case study
- ideas for design or dissemination of findings
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Tonnie van der Zouwen

Tilburg University Netherlands
Department of Organization Studies
info@tonnievanderzouwen.nl
Tel. + 31650697982
www.tilburguniversity.nl
www.largescaleinterventions.com

Current design of the field study “Learning from Large Scale Interventions”

Phases and questions	Activities	Results	Goals
1. Exploring the field - What do we already know about the effects of LSI on the longer term? What are “fields to explore”? - What do we have to look for? What do practioners consider valid measures/observables for sustainable effects, e.g. collective learning? What questions should we ask in our interviews and case studies? - Who has more information, who should we involve in the next steps of this field study?	- literature study	- reference list - first description of the “state of the art”	- Describe the state of the art
	- research labs with “experts”	- criteria for sustainable effects - questions for further exploration - information about cases, sites, documents, contacts, ongoing research ... - network of professional practioners	- immersion in the field
	- keeping a diary for reflections	- reflections on inquiry process	
	- keeping a journal of actions and results	- report of the journey	
	- writing up results so far	- concept overview of “the state of the art”	
	- member check by e-mail	- validated overview of “the state of the art”	
	- organise a conference with stakeholders (practioners, managers, researchers, ...)		- validation of findings
	- writing up results of this phase	- article for publication - list of potential cases - criteria for case study	- honour participants - dissemination of insights
2. Case selection - What sites can offer answers to the research questions?	- literature study - case selection, based on results of phase 1	- cases and contact persons	- planning the case study
3. Case studies - What effects do participants experience, after LSI-trajectories? - What are the working elements in the process? - What relations can be seen between working elements and effects?	Retrospective inquiry on site by: - open, in depth, interviews with participants - gathering of observables for analyses - analyzing of agreements, context conditions, designs, reports and other	- case descriptions - interview reports - retrospective insights in effects - diary and journal of the inquirer -(to be filled in)	- gathering data

Phases and questions	Activities	Results	Goals
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> observables - analyzing measures for effects - 		
<p>4. Broadening the view</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to be filled in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to be filled in after previous steps; internet survey? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - broader view on effects of LSI, based on more trajectories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - broadening the view
<p>5. Interpretation and conceptualization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What can we learn from this study for the practice of LSI? - What insights are there about the effects of LSI? - What insights are there for the development of collective learning? - What can we learn about the research process for evaluation of interactive trajectories with LSI? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - member checks - refer to theories about strategies for change, and collective learning - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - validation and dissemination of findings - theses - article - website - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - answering the research questions - reflection on the process of the fieldstudy - dissemination of insights