

Group and Organizational Learning Processes

Real Time Strategic Change

Real Time Strategic Change RTSC is a 'whole systems change' approach for working with large groups ranging from 50 to 2000 or more. The methodology was developed by Kathie Dannemiller and became widespread through a book written by Robert Jacobs in the early 1990s. Typically a RTSC event is conducted over 2 to 3 days and the group size is limited only by the choice of venue.

RTSC events can be used for different purposes because they do not follow a standardized format. Each event is customized to the situation and the objectives of the sponsor. Yet, RTSC events follow certain principles. The two most important of these are firstly the use of highly diverse groups and secondly Richard Beckhard's and David Gleicher's formula for change, $DVF > R$. Participants sit in groups of eight with as many functions and hierarchical levels represented as possible. This enhances the possibilities of learning from each other and broadens one's perspective.

Beckhard and Gleicher's formula for change, $DVF > R$, stands for Dissatisfaction, **D** times Vision, **V**, times first steps, **F**, must be greater than resistance, **R**, if change is to happen. This means that during an RTSC event there are always activities that increase the dissatisfaction with reality, create identification with a common vision and offer the chance to plan next steps. Application of those two principles lead to an important result: participants of an RTSC event broaden their views considerably. They see more than they saw before and this creates a good deal of positive energy.

The historical development of Real Time Strategic Change RTSC is connected with that of Future Search and the two methods are similar in several ways (for example the use of diverse groups of eight participants) but there are some important differences (most notably the maximum group size of 64 from Future Search does not apply to RTSC). Compared to other large group interventions, a unique characteristic of RTSC is that it can be applied in a more top-down fashion than other techniques like Open Space Technology or Future Search. Senior management can bring to the event a draft of strategic goals, a new structure, a new process or something else and ask for comments on that draft. The draft can then be further developed during the conference with the executive team including the proposals from the participants in their, now revised, draft.

Real Time Strategic Change is not just an event, but the beginning of a process that leads to a fundamental system-wide change in the way the organisation works. At the core of RTSC are seven immutable design principles; Firstly get the whole system in the room and have a representative sample of this system design the event; including some sceptics. Secondly foster maximum ownership of process, content and outcomes. Thirdly work in real time (with simultaneous planning and implementation). Fourthly use the current reality as a key driver of change and work with the group where it is, rather than where you think it ought to be. Fifthly describe the preferred future, where participants create a compelling vision of what it will look, sound and feel like. Sixthly build and maintain a common database of strategic information that is available to all. Lastly create a sense of community and foster an environment where individuals come together as part of something larger than themselves and work to build something that they believe in.

Real Time Strategic Change RTSC is an adaptable technique that can be applied to a wide range of purposes including; gaining buy-in from employees for a new strategy, mobilizing the workforce to achieve important goals, initiating cultural change, developing a shared vision or mission, reenergizing an organization during or after a difficult period, creating a new structure or process or – of course - improving collaboration between parts of an organization or with an external supplier.

For more information on the principles behind Real Time Strategic Change get hold of the book; **Real Time Strategic Change: How to Involve an Entire Organization in Fast and Far-Reaching Change** by Robert Jacobs (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1997).