

# Generating Leadership Possibilities

*An AI way for developing HR change leadership*

R Sankarasubramanian, Dr. Hardik Shah and Dr. Wasundhara Joshi

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## **Introduction:**

The last decade has been a time of “high voltage” changes in organizations – be it mergers and acquisitions, layoffs, restructuring, changes in leadership, new products and services, technological changes and so on. The prognosis for the next decade is not very different; perhaps change will happen at higher levels of frequency and intensity.

The Human Resources Group in organizations is expected to catalyze and anchor this change process. However, in many organizations, the human resources group itself becomes the holder of cynicism towards change. Then, change efforts fail and lead to new levels of frustration among employees within the organization.

We see an opportunity here because we see huge potential among the HR Professionals to unleash the energy and take leadership for organizational change. We believe that they have the ability and can be key to the success and institutionalization of change. All that is needed is to bring back the self-belief and the willingness to do so. This was the premise of our work with an HR group of the largest public sector steel company in India.

## **The Organization:**

The Client Organization is the market leader and India’s largest integrated steel manufacturer with a capacity of 12mm tons, sales turnover exceeding 4 Billion USD and a workforce of 125,000. Its vision is to be a respected world-class corporation and the leader in quality, productivity, profitability and customer satisfaction amongst Indian steel businesses.

### **Objectives of the Intervention:**

Based on discussions with the Executive Director of the HR division of the organization, the following objectives were created for the intervention:

- Developing Appreciative Leadership- the ability to perceive the positive and generative potential inherent in a given situation and to act purposively to transform the potential to outcomes.
- Gain the ability to diagnose and facilitate organizational change.
- Identify and co-create change projects within the organization

The above objectives had the dimensions of personal growth, building competencies for change leadership and creating application projects in their home environments.

### **The Process:**

The assignment was designed in two phases.

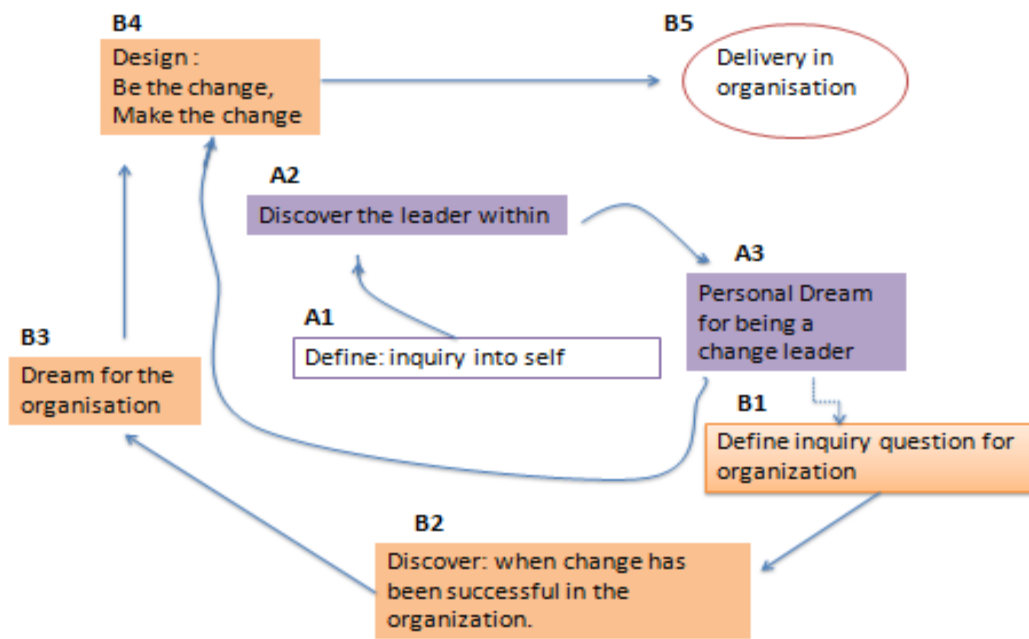
- An initial *Workshop Phase*, to sensitize the management to AI, and to work intensively with the self and others to become change leaders. A 5-day experiential workshop was designed using AI and other process technologies for 25 HR Managers from different plants spread across the country.
- A *Follow up Phase* to measure the impact for AI applications and projects using a Questionnaire Survey (Qualitative & Quantitative) and telephone interviews.

### **The Workshop:**

The workshop was designed as inside-outside loop learning with two cycles of AI flowing into one another. We believe that all change must begin within, and only then will it be reflected in the outside world. Leadership is as much, if not more, about 'being' than about 'doing'.

Therefore, to familiarize the participants with the methodology, the AI process was followed in both phases, with the inquiry for the first being one to discover the change leader within oneself. The first two days were focused on the self, followed by another cycle of AI where the inquiry was about their respective organizations and where the participants have led/ were involved in systemic change.

### The Inside- Outside Loop



#### The Inside loop: The Self.

These were not people who naturally saw themselves as leaders of change. They belonged to a fairly conservative, traditional, public sector company with set beliefs in what was and was not ‘appropriate’. Our first challenge was to break that so as to allow creativity to flow.

We became children, played childhood games, and encouraged poetry and drama as means of expression. As the group realized that it was acceptable, in fact appreciated when participants could bring their ‘whole selves’ into the training room, with all their creativity and emotions as well as their skills and thinking, the energy in the room began to shift.

This was also possible because we invested two whole days in working with the self, before moving into organization change.

As stated earlier, we believe this is very important; it's a bit like marinating a dish. Once the process is complete,

the next steps flow effortlessly and become a joy. In these two days we discovered the life giving forces that strengthen personal change, through sharing stories of personal change experiences and the

AI process	Methods and Activities
<b>Define</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Icebreakers</li> <li>• AI film</li> <li>• AI theory presentation</li> <li>• Defining purpose of HR change leadership using Café Method</li> </ul>
<b>Discovery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Story telling of peak experiences of leading change in personal and organizational life</li> <li>• Identifying life giving forces of change</li> <li>• Discovering themes from the stories and presenting them as poetry and songs in the participant's language</li> </ul>
<b>Dream</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a personal dream of being a change leader by writing an autobiography of their future</li> <li>• Creating a Harvard Business Review article on the organization that would be published in 2012.</li> <li>• Developing a provocative proposition for HR change leadership</li> </ul>
<b>Design</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying the underlying elements of purpose, values and elements of culture that will help build this dream</li> <li>• Identifying opportunities to implement the dream.</li> </ul>
<b>Delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation of the project plan in small teams with specific steps and outcomes expected.</li> <li>• Presentation to the Executive Director.</li> <li>• Getting organizational support for implementation</li> </ul>

leadership roles they played. The focus was on the Individual as well as her/his role as a Leader in Human Resources. Telling personal stories of change and leadership, creating poetry to describe change processes with the organization and their role, helped participants to review their construction of their own personhood as well as their role. The process generated hope and anticipation for change that was expressed by designing the cover for their personal story for the future. This was the personal dream.

### **The outside loop: The Organization**

On the third day the focus moved to the organization. The entire AI process was repeated.

This time the inquiry was into stories of leading change in the organization. We used the

World Café method for the discovery, to give a sense of newness to the experience. It was followed by the dream where we asked the participants to write about their successes as a case study for the Harvard Business Review, which thrilled them no end. They finalized the provocative proposition both in English and Hindi; Hindi is a more natural language and as Indians we find it more expressive and poetic.

The proposition: *“We unleash the potential and make our organization a World Leader with a Human Touch by Inspiring Trust, Cultivating Competence, Opening Minds and Celebrating achievements”*

### **Connecting the inside to the outside:**

This was led by identifying the underlying elements of purpose, values and elements of culture that will help build this dream. The process of co-creating the dream for HR Change leadership for the organization was ignited by the energies built from the first two days of discovering change leadership within themselves; by looking at changes required within themselves as HR leaders – the values, behaviors and practices that they will adopt – *to be the change that they want to see in their organization*. This energy flowed into the projects identified by them. Care was taken to pick up simple and yet significant assignments.

#### **Some of the projects/ assignments taken up participants to implement AI**

- **Improving patient satisfaction in Steel Plant Township Hospital**
- **Plant wide implementation of AI based practices**
- **Instituting scholarships for children from Community around Steel Plant**
- **Developing better relationship between Town Maintenance staff and Employees.**

- **Manpower utilization, motivation of ground level operators**

Converting the

provocative proposition to tangible assignments was an important step.

Processes included giving the final shape for the dream to be internalized at a personal level and identifying action plans to get organizational commitment for the various change possibilities identified within their steel plants with timeframes.

All projects were created with specific plan, deadlines, responsibilities and first steps. Many used AI as the base for the design. The participants then presented these projects to the Executive Director of the organization to get organizational commitment and support

### **The Follow Up:**

Three months after the workshop, we initiated a survey to determine the status of the projects identified and impact on the participants as well their role as HR Change Leaders. The results indicated a very high level of learning and internalization of the AI philosophy and process within the participants. As illustrations, 60% stated that AI has given them a new perspective to look at issues of change management and 80% people stated that AI has helped them deal with each other in a more emotionally mature manner.

This was also evident in the qualitative feedback like the quotes given below:

*“AI is an eye opener, has to be cultured & nurtured continuously”*

*“My team is now perceiving me as a more positive and dynamic HR person”*

The participants have completed other projects in addition to the one's they had committed during the workshop. The project documentations have been listed and shared in the company's intranet. These projects are in the form of workshops, studies, meetings to resolve some “issues” and so on. The common characteristic about them is the use of the “inside-outside” loop of self and organization in the methodologies used. The network of

learners that have been created continues to support and enhance each other's capacity to lead systemic change within the organization.

### **Our Learning:**

This has been an inspiring project for the three of us. Working with the managers of a 60 year old organization with more than 25 years experience, and building excitement about new possibilities in their lives was a challenge. But we believed in them and they started believing in themselves! Some of our professional learning from this assignment is given below:

- HR Leadership is the holder of organizational cynicism and releasing this energy is crucial for organizational change. Building Change Leadership among HR is key to bring about sustainable change within large organizations
- Holding the belief as Consultants that beyond the cynicism there is hope – releasing the energy of cynicism brings in hope.
- Reinforcing our faith in self work; discovering the change leader within is a trigger to developing organizational change leadership
- Using all channels of expression; storytelling, writing, poetry, painting, collage making, music, dance etc. helps groups to discover hidden talents within themselves. This helps letting go of cynicism by reconnecting to those deep spaces where possibilities have been long buried. Releasing this energy becomes a powerful vehicle for driving self belief leading to external change.
- The advantage of five days of full time work with a cohesive work group enhances effectiveness of an AI intervention

- All good things do come to an end. This project follow up were affected by the budget cuts in the organization because of economic recession. The seeds of change that have been planted and the capacity to recreate the “inside-outside loop” for change will remain embedded in the HR organization’s DNA.

These are the “small” but significant and enduring benefits of “large” institutional change efforts!

*Post-Script: In a recent conversation with the Senior Manager- Training and Development, there was a indication given that this project will be budgeted for in the new financial year April 2010-March 2011.*



**R Sankarasubramanyan** is the Director of ChangeWorks ([www.changeworksindia.com](http://www.changeworksindia.com)) and Past President of the Indian Society for Applied Behavioral Science, ISABS ([www.isabs.org](http://www.isabs.org)). He is also a professional member of the NTL Institute of Applied Behavioral Science ([www.ntl.org](http://www.ntl.org)). He has a Masters Degree in HR with 20 years of work experience in HR function both in India and abroad. He was a Consultant for the Academy on this assignment.



**Dr Hardik Shah** is an Assistant Professor with the Academy of Human Resources Management in India. ([www.academyofhrd.org](http://www.academyofhrd.org)). A Doctorate in Management



from Nirma University, Ahmedabad, he has worked as Asst. Professor at University of Petroleum and Energy Studies and Manager-Research at AIMS, Bangalore. He was Chief Editor 'AJBMR', and has published/presented more than 25 research papers in different journals/conferences. Hardik Coordinated and anchored this assignment along with the Director of the Academy – Mr. KK Verma.



**Dr. Wasundhara Joshi** is the Executive Director of SNEHA, an NGO that works with Woman and Child issues in the urban slums of Mumbai using Appreciative Inquiry ([www.snehamumbai.org](http://www.snehamumbai.org)). She is also a professional member of ISABS ([www.isabs.org](http://www.isabs.org)). She is a Pediatrician turned Behavioral Scientist. She was a consultant for the Academy on this assignment.