Advancing SAS² Learning and Application Within The Ginger Group (2005-2008)

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www.gingergroup.net

Key Words

Freelisting, The Wheel, Option Domain, forum, workplace engagement, organizational development, training, communities of practice, consultants, Canada

Context

The Ginger Group Collaborative [GGC] is:
- a community of practice of more than 20 consultants and educators with different specialties [planning, evaluation, large group intervention, change management, leadership development, community and stakeholder engagement, coaching]
- committed to using participatory approaches to achieve transformational and results-based change in organizations and communities
- dispersed across Canada and the Pacific Northwest of the United States.

Our involvement with SAS²:
- started in 2005 when Ottawa-based consultants Kate McLaren and Paul Turcot participated in a SAS² training and identified the potential fit between the SAS² approach and GGC practice
- has been a three-year process of learning and using SAS² in our work.

Questions

- How can organizational development practitioners learn and incorporate SAS² into their diverse organizational and community development practices?
- How does the current SAS² training and development approach support mastery and application?

Tools

The GGC has used or been exposed to:
- Freelisting and Pile Sorting
- Socratic Wheel
- Options/Social Domain
- Activity/Network Dynamics

As subgroups and individuals, we have used and applied:
- Force Field Analysis

- Stakeholder Identification
- Rainbow Technique
- Ideal Scenario
- Timeline
- Values/Interests/Positions
- Input/Output
- Causal Dynamics
- Levels of Support
- Validation.

Participants

Core groups are composed of the following people in:
- **Ottawa/Gatineau:** Kate McLaren, Helen Patterson, Pamela Smit, and Paul Turcot
- **Edmonton**: Peter Faid
- **Victoria region:** Diana Smith and Michael Keller (Victoria); Jean Singer (Seattle).

Photo: May 2005 - Ginger SAS^2 workshop – Being introduced to key tools and processes

Outcomes

Our key milestones include:
- Custom designed SAS^2 workshop (May 2005)
- GGC Inquiry using SAS^2 techniques (Socratic Wheel, Options Domain) to identify the elements that distinguish the GGC as a community of practice (May 2005)
- GGC Inquiry on Strategic Planning including a one day SAS^2 session (August 2006)
- Peer Learning Network established by interested GGC affiliates (2005–present)

Level 1 SAS^2 workshops (Edmonton and Winnipeg) and Level 2 SAS^2 workshops (Edmonton) convened and co-facilitated by GGC affiliates in November and May 2007.

What do you have energy for this weekend? (0 = no energy; 10 = high energy)
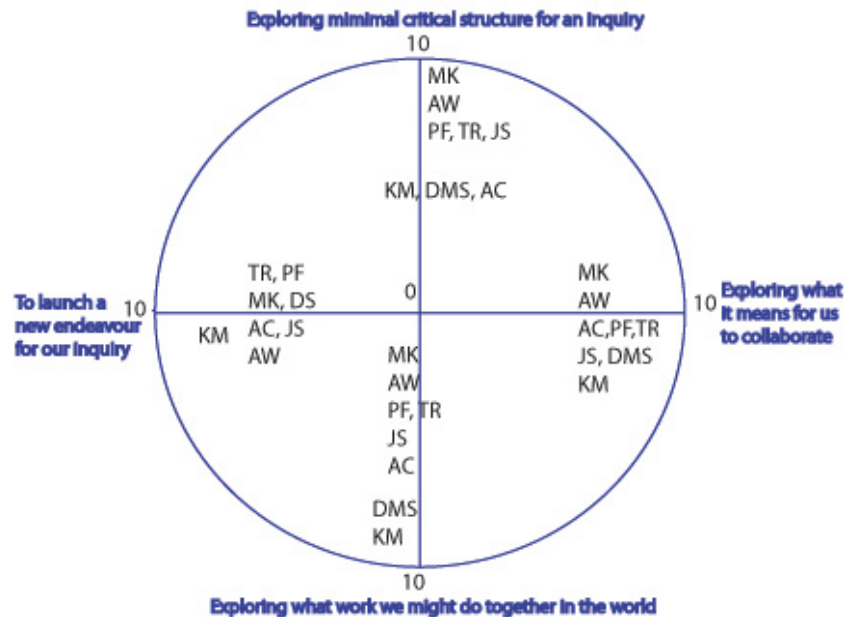
A. Incorporating SAS[2] in our consulting work

- We are actively engaging with SAS[2] techniques within our networks and work, recognizing its value in fostering organizational and community learning and decision making.
- SAS[2] techniques are being used for visioning, priority-setting, strategic planning, capacity building, evaluation, board development and leadership capacity-building in different client contexts.
- Two GGC affiliates are certified as SAS[2] practitioners. Others are applying and integrating SAS[2] at varying levels.

B. Continued and significant investment in our own learning

Beyond participation in Level 1 and Level 2 SAS[2] training sessions, GGC affiliates have supported each other to build individual and collective competency in SAS[2] in many ways:

a) Ginger affiliate teleconferences have focused on SAS[2] applications

b) We have discussed project- specific designs where SAS[2] might apply to our work with clients

c) We have created of a common workspace [using Central Desktop software] to house SAS[2] documentation

d) We have pursued informal opportunities to explore and practice techniques

e) We have co-designed and debriefed after selected SAS[2] events with Jacques and Daniel to develop 'navigating' competencies.

C. Providing leadership to expand the reach of SAS² in Canada

The Ginger Group Collaborative has expanded the impact and reach of SAS² with consultants, the public, and non-profit managers by:

- Coordinating and sponsoring public training sessions in Ottawa, Winnipeg, and Edmonton.

- Modelling shared leadership and investment of volunteer time for mentoring, organizing, and follow-up support after training sessions.

Figure 4: Ginger Group Learning Edges, Arnprior Inquiry, August, 2006
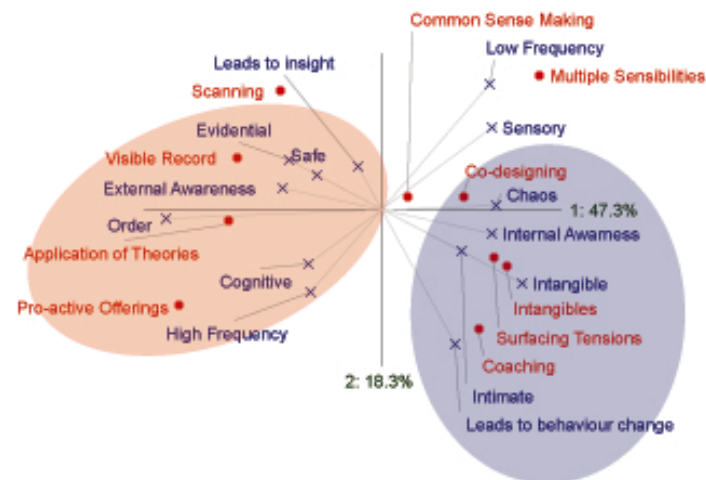
Contributions of SAS² to our Work with Organizations and communities

SAS² brings a structure and rigor to complex issues and relationships. Its primary value in supporting organizational and community capacity building is to:

1. Create a systematic way to discern root causes and underlying issues and to then apply tools to address those issues.

2. Systematize and quantify qualitative data.
3. Visually externalize complex variables, relationships, and information to help make sense of them.
4. Use both left and right brain thinking to help a "system to see itself" as a whole.

Challenges and Future Research Recommendations

1. GGC affiliates are working to develop proficiency in two SAS^2 competency areas:

   a) Navigating—how to assess and discern what SAS^2 techniques to use in a given client context
   b) Interpreting results—creating meaning when using advanced SAS^2 techniques such as Domain/Dynamics Analysis.

   Recommendation 1:
   Identify complementary ways of assisting with the development of these two competencies.

2. The results-based North American culture often sets limited time frames for a particular process or event. GGC affiliates have struggled to incorporate SAS^2 tools in contracts with clients when there is limited time for experimentation. A lack of examples where SAS^2 has been used in a North American, consultant/client setting for organizational and community development increases the challenge.

   Recommendation 2:
   Develop a knowledge base of cases that shows best practices within a North American consulting/contractual setting to support the ongoing learning of consultant practitioners.

3. The SAS^2 training approach whets the appetite and is a good launching pad for learning. Mastery requires significant additional personal investment and knowledge of action research approaches. SAS^2 training needs to be complemented and supported by action learning in the following ways:

   a) Integration of experiential, adult learning processes into the development model
   b) Mentoring, shadowing, and accompaniment
   c) Peer learning networks.

   Recommendation 3:
   Research and refine the SAS^2 training and development model to better model adult learning practices; this will replicate and extend the reach of SAS^2.