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INCREASING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION WITH SELF-ORGANIZING MEETING PROCESSES*

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ABSTRACT

Involving many people in community-based research provides many benefits, such as more labor power and increased buy-in. Traditional meeting formats, however, are not well suited to attracting broad engagement. One way to address this challenge is to instead employ self-organizing meeting processes, which are designed to invite active participation from attendees, and do not predefine the agenda. This article describes three such processes, 1) Open Space Technology, 2) World Café, and 3) Dynamic Facilitation, followed by my observations on their advantages and disadvantages when employed in community-based research efforts. Their use requires giving up a great amount of control when compared with traditional, top-down meeting approaches, and may result in actions beyond, or even excluding, research. The strong possibility of failing to address organizers' own short-term goals, however, should be balanced with the higher likelihood of achieving the broader community's long-term goals.

Community-based research brings together community members and academic researchers, but it typically involves relatively small groups of people. Community members involved in these efforts may represent just a fraction of the people whose livelihoods they are trying to improve. While bringing an entire community into the research process in all but the smallest communities may be impossible, there are potential benefits to increasing rates of participation. Some of these benefits may include: 1) more labor power and a more efficient division of labor, 2) greater community awareness of the issues they face, and 3) increased buy-in for disseminating and applying the results of the research (Leung, Yen, and Minkler 2004).

Involving more people in community-based research can be a significant challenge, however. Traditional structures for bringing people together often discourage sustained participation by those who are not the organizers, as they reflect dominant institutions' "command and control" philosophies. A top-down approach is quite attractive to those at upper levels in a hierarchy for maintaining or expanding power, even if it comes at the cost of effectiveness in achieving organizational goals (Carson 2008). These traditional top-down structures may

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suffice in the workplace, when one is being paid to submit to them, but there is little motivation for volunteers to accept such a passive role. The result is that researchers attempting to create community-based research projects often end up "in the middle," working with community professionals, rather than working from the grassroots (Strand et al. 2003:72). That may be adequate when conditions are stable, the problems are relatively straightforward, and widespread community engagement is not necessary for success; but entirely inadequate when dealing with more "wicked" problems (i.e., those that are very difficult to solve because they are not well understood, and there is no "right" or "wrong" answer) (Conklin 2005; White 2000).

One way to address the challenge of increasing participation in community-based research is to employ self-organizing meeting processes, which are specifically designed to invite more input from attendees. Self-organization refers to changes that happen through the intrinsic motivation of the participants, and without top-down imposition. Such bottom-up approaches do not predefine the agenda, nor do they predefine the outcomes. Thus, they are more inviting to the broader community.

This article introduces three self-organizing meeting processes that are particularly well suited to increasing participation in community-based research: 1) Open Space Technology, 2) World Café, and 3) Dynamic Facilitation. The applications of these processes to community-based research, either singly or in combination, are then described. The advantages of self-organizing processes in community-based research are discussed, including catalyzing greater enthusiasm and creativity. The potential disadvantages of these processes, such as increased time commitments and financial expenses, are also explored.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for those wishing to implement these techniques is that they all entail a significant loss of organizers' control of the process and outcomes (Owen 2007). This may result in difficulty in achieving the organizers' own short-term goals. For practitioners of community-based research, for example, this may mean that "research" itself must be reconceptualized, and given less emphasis than other desired outcomes. These disadvantages are likely to be outweighed, however, by the greater potential of self-organizing meeting processes to achieve long-term community goals when compared with less participatory approaches.

INTRODUCTION TO SELF-ORGANIZING PROCESSES

Margaret Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers have explained that emphasizing self-organization allows people to "do for themselves most of what in the past has been done to them" (1998:38). Approaches that rely on self-organization must therefore refrain from attempting to impose, in advance, the possible outcomes. In addition, they typically involve a capacity to change continuously, and do not constrain people within rigid structures. Self-organizing systems often share other properties, such as *emergence* and *chaordic* structures. Emergence is a term that refers to the process of deriving new connections or structures in a complex system. These cannot be known in advance, and result from the less-complicated interactions of less-complicated parts. In human organizations this might refer to social interactions that lead to a coherent group. Other examples could include flocks of birds or schools of fish, as their group behavior cannot easily be understood by simply examining the behavior of the individuals.

Chaordic is a term coined by Dee Hock, a founder of VISA, an organization that is jointly owned by 21,000 financial institutions to issue credit cards. The term refers to the boundary between chaos and order, and the fact that what seems messy may lead to coherent whole. Chaordic organizations or *chaords* may go through a process of falling apart and coming back together again. Following self-organizing principles, Hock suggested that, in chaordic organizations, power and governance should be distributed to the greatest degree possible. This is a dramatic contrast to the hierarchical organizational structures that are so common in our society (Hock 1999).

There are dozens of methods for creating the conditions for self-organization, emergence, and chaords in communities—these are also called whole systems approaches (Holman, Devane, and Cady 2007) or large group methods (Bunker and Alban 2006). The academic literature evaluating the success of these approaches is relatively sparse, found primarily in business and public administration journals, and typically qualitative. Most of the descriptions and case studies to date suggest that self-organizing processes result in a high degree of stakeholder involvement, an increased commitment to action, and more creative problem solving, when compared with traditional meeting structures (Bryson and Anderson 2000; Worley, Mohrman, and Nevitt 2011).

While some researchers caution that increased community participation may not be worth the additional effort in all situations (e.g., Irvin and Stansbury 2004; Koontz and Johnson 2004), studies reporting suboptimal outcomes have often involved meeting formats that are lower on Arnstein's (1969) ladder of

participation; in other words, community "participation" was at the token levels of informing or consulting, rather than higher levels, such as delegated power or citizen control. When accounting for the process, more active forms of increasing community participation typically result in greater success than top-down approaches, particularly when they acknowledge power inequalities such as gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (e.g., Pretty 1995; Reed 2008). Even self-organizing approaches, however, are likely to generate fewer creative ideas when the group composition is skewed toward high status members of a community, such as medical doctors (Worley et al. 2011).

Some self-organizing meeting processes may be better suited to community-based research than others. Open Space Technology, the World Café, and Dynamic Facilitation are three that can be implemented with modest budgets, and do not require extensive training. They may also be used in situations where community members can spare only a few hours for a meeting and where the number of participants is difficult to predict. They are, therefore, more flexible than some related techniques, such as Future Search, which requires an experienced facilitator and a commitment from 60 to 70 people for two and a half days (Janoff and Weisbord 2006).

Open Space Technology

Open Space Technology is a process that was developed beginning in 1985 by Harrison Owen. Owen explained that the impetus was his experience organizing a conference. He spent nearly a year planning the event, and when it was over he asked for feedback from attendees. He was disheartened to learn that most people said the best part of the conference was the coffee breaks (Owen 2008).

Owen's frustration led to an insight that there might be a better way to organize meetings, so that they encouraged the types of interactions that occurred during coffee breaks. He attempted to make this as simple as possible in his experiments, and continued to remove elements until only necessary elements remained. As a result, in its current form, the facilitator of an Open Space meeting speaks for no more than fifteen minutes. For much of the event the facilitator simply wanders around picking up garbage.

Open Space Technology has been used by organizations ranging from youth groups to churches to corporations. The results have included the development of new product lines, programs, and mission statements, as well as the resolution of longstanding conflicts. The format can accommodate groups of almost any size; one meeting of street kids in Bogotá, Columbia, involved more than 2,000 participants.

Meetings begin with all the participants seated in chairs arranged in one big circle. The facilitator stands in the middle of the circle and explains the process. Within a few minutes people are announcing topics for breakout sessions. The facilitator invites those who are passionate about a topic related to the theme of the meeting, and willing to take responsibility for convening a meeting to discuss this topic, to come to the center of the circle when they are ready. These participants then write down an issue or opportunity (or several), announce it to the group, and say their name. They then tape the paper to a wall called the "bulletin board," along with a specific time and place to meet, before returning to the circle. When all topics have been announced, everyone moves to the bulletin board for a "market place," which involves signing up for the sessions they want to attend.

At the outset, the facilitator briefly explains some guiding principles for an Open Space Technology meeting. These are: 1) whoever comes are the right people, 2) whatever happens is the only thing that could have, 3) whenever it starts is the right time, 4) when it is over it is over. These principles help participants understand that it is important that the people who are attending breakouts want to be there, even if this means that no one else comes to a proposed session. They also encourage people to let go of preconceptions about what will be accomplished at the meeting, and that it is important to pay attention to the group's energy, rather than the clock. If they accomplish what they want before the time allotted is over, they are encouraged to move on. Conversely, they are encouraged to continue working past the allotted time (although they may have to move if their space is reserved by another convener) if they are not done.

There is one "law" in Open Space Technology and that is the law of mobility. This means that people are encouraged to leave a session if they are neither learning nor participating. This creates what are called 'bumblebees' and 'butterflies.' Bumblebees are people who flit from one session to another, cross-pollinating ideas. Butterflies may not go to any sessions, but create centers of stillness, and the opportunity to engage in a conversation. Such conversations may trigger a thought that can have an influence on a larger group. This law also helps keep long-winded people in check, because they know that if they talk too long, other participants may leave.

Meetings typically last two and a half days, although shorter meetings are possible. When the meeting lasts at least two full days conveners typically type up notes of their sessions. These are then compiled into a document summarizing all of the sessions distributed before the participants leave the next day. With another half day, participants can prioritize the issues in these proceedings. Meetings (and

days in multi-day events) end with a closing circle, which allows participants to share their experiences with the group as a whole.

The World Café

The World Café process was developed in 1995 by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs, and it involves setting up a café ambiance to hold conversations around specific questions (Brown 2005). As with Open Space Technology, The World Café can accommodate groups of varying sizes, from as few as 12, to more than 1,000. Although it allows for more control of the agenda by the organizers when compared with Open Space Technology, it is perhaps better for creating conditions where true dialogue can easily emerge.

The event begins with participants seated 4 or 5 to a table. To create a café style atmosphere conducive to vibrant conversations, each table usually has a vase of flowers, the lighting is natural if possible, and music is playing softly in the background. After discussing a suggested question for 20 to 30 minutes, all but one person, the "host," move to another table to carry the themes to new conversations. The host begins the next round by sharing insights from the table's previous conversation, inviting the others to link and connect these to their previous conversations. The process is then repeated, or participants may return to their original table to synthesize their conversations from other tables.

The tables are also covered with flip chart paper, and participants are encouraged to doodle and write on them. At the end of several rounds (usually three) participants engage in a conversation as a whole group. This is not a report back, but a time for mutual reflection. Participants are invited to briefly share an idea, theme or question with real personal meaning that emerged during the event. A recorder/facilitator may write these down on flip charts, sometimes using graphics to create a group mind map. Alternatively, participants can write these down on post-it notes, and work collectively to group similar ideas and identify themes. The entire event may last from 1 to 5 hours.

The principles for hosting a World Café are (Brown 2005:174):

- Set the context: clarify the purpose and broad parameters within which the dialogue will unfold.
- Create hospitable space: Assure the welcoming environment and psychological safety that nurture personal comfort and mutual respect.
- Explore questions that matter: Focus collective attention on powerful questions that attract collaborative engagement.

- Encourage everyone's contribution: Enliven the relationship between the "me" and the "we" by inviting full participation and mutual giving.
- Cross-pollinate and connect diverse perspectives: Use the living system dynamics of emergence through intentionally increasing the diversity of perspectives and density of connections while retaining a common focus on core questions.
- Listen together for patterns, insights, and deeper questions: Focus shared attention in ways that nurture coherence of thought without losing individual contribution.
- Harvest and share collective discoveries: Make collective knowledge and insight visible and actionable

These principles may be encouraged with a corresponding, but shorter, list of suggestions placed on each table, labeled "Café Etiquette." This is sometimes further reinforced by using a "talking piece" placed on the table. This object must be held to speak, encouraging others to refrain from interrupting.

The World Café method has been informed by another whole systems approach called Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry emphasizes focusing on the positive aspects of organizations when gathering data, and avoiding a "problem-solving" approach to change. Its proponents take seriously the social construction of reality, and suggest that positive changes will occur most rapidly when linked to positive examples of success (Cooperrider & Whitney 2001). The World Café implements this philosophy by suggesting that the questions chosen for discussion be positive. For example, rather than asking, "what is wrong?" or "who is to blame?," questions should focus on "what is working well, and how can we build on it?"

Dynamic Facilitation

Dynamic Facilitation is an approach to holding meetings developed by Jim Rough while working as a consultant at a sawmill, to help workers creatively address difficult problems (2002). Rough has been teaching this method to others since 1990. Dynamic Facilitation often leads to "breakthroughs." For example, a group of loggers used this process to solve an "impossible" problem: management had turned down their request for new communication radios and they saw no way of changing the situation. Their current radio models made it difficult to communicate, so that moving logs on the mountainside was unsafe. When the facilitator asked why they wanted to improve safety, one answer was that the

loggers were held responsible for safety at their sites. Their breakthrough was to realize that they were not given full responsibility. Their point of view changed to recognize that their level of responsibility required greater decision-making authority. After discussing this new perspective with management they received new radios, as well as a greater voice in other workplace issues (Rough 2002).

The process of Dynamic Facilitation involves having a designated facilitator or "listener" who attempts to write down everything participants say on four charts. These charts are labeled "problems," "solutions, "concerns," and "data." In contrast to other forms of facilitation, the Dynamic Facilitator does not attempt to direct the conversation. This is usually introduced to the participants with an analogy to a jigsaw puzzle; the group may jump around while working on various parts of a bigger picture.

The facilitator's most important role is making sure that everyone feels that they are being heard. As a result, the facilitator in some situations may need to draw people out by asking them questions to clarify or further explain their comments. In other situations, the facilitator may need to ensure that one person is speaking at a time, and that opposing viewpoints are encouraged. In all situations, statements are recorded as numbered items on a list in one of the four categories. The emphasis is not on making sure that the statements are recorded in exactly the right category, but that everyone's contributions are written down.

Rosa Zubizarreta and Jim Rough have suggested that as participants feel fully heard, they begin to expand their focus and listen to others for their contributions to the bigger picture (2002). Usually this requires that participants first express what is already on their mind, or what they already know. After "dumping" this information and feeling that their contributions are valued by the facilitator, beginning to listen to other perspectives is easier. As participants recognize the complexity of the situation when considering multiple points of view, they begin to suggest creative solutions.

A fifth chart is used to record breakthroughs, or to bookmark at the group's progress when the meeting ends. The facilitator does not try to push the group to a decision or consensus, and in fact, must make sure that no one is holding back when there might be an agreement. Points of convergence usually quickly move to points of divergence, and the role of the facilitator is to make sure that these convergences are real, and to help the group recognize their progress (Zubizarreta and Rough 2002).

One of the greatest strengths of Dynamic Facilitation is that it encourages people to "be themselves." Other than making sure members of the group speak one

at a time, the facilitator does not ask anyone to modify their behavior or adhere to any ground rules. Often, the facilitator will introduce Dynamic Facilitation by asking participants to be sure to speak up when they feel "out of step" with the rest of the group, because "their unique perspective may well turn out to be the missing piece of the puzzle" (Zubizarreta and Rough 2002:18). They can be passionate and emotional, and still their contributions are valued.

Dynamic Facilitation is probably best suited for groups of 40 or less. For larger communities, a sample might be selected to attempt to achieve consensus, or (with enough facilitators) participants could self-select into breakout groups. It is recommended to schedule meetings for 2 to 3 hours. In addition, a total of 3 or 4 meetings should be scheduled, no more than one week apart. After that, a consistent group is likely to be capable of self-facilitation (Zubizaretta and Rough 2002).

Dialogue Mapping is another process that has some strong similarities to Dynamic Facilitation. Both involve recording ideas that emerge from the group, and allow for problem solving to occur in the nonlinear manner that is natural to us, rather than forcing a linear agenda (Conklin 2005; Zubizarreta 2006). Dialogue Mapping's four categories for classifying contributions are "questions," "ideas," "pros" and "cons," with the latter two linked to an idea, and ideas linked to a question. Facilitation can be assisted with an open source computer program called Compendium (version 1.5.2), which is used to structure the notes and, with a projector, display them to participants as they are recorded (Compendium Institute 2010). Dialogue Mapping requires more training than Dynamic Facilitation, but for communities with the resources to hire a skilled facilitator (or someone willing to undergo more extensive training), the technique may have some advantages with respect to showing the connections among ideas in the notes, particularly for community members that were unable to attend the meeting.

APPLYING SELF-ORGANIZING PROCESSES IN COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH

Self-organizing processes could be considered community-based research in and of themselves because they involve people in exchanging information and learning about the issues regarding which they are collectively concerned. However, they may also lead to larger research projects that extend past an initial meeting. Such projects may involve low or high participation from community members. At one end of a continuum of participation, for example, questions generated by one of these processes might lead to academic researchers investigating them, as in the Dutch Science Shop model (Wachelder 2003). At the other end of this continuum,

members of the community may be fully involved in refining the question, collecting and analyzing more data, and communicating and applying the results. The potential for emergent processes to initiate discrete research projects in the framework of these two ideal types are discussed below.

Applying Open Space Technology

Open Space Technology encourages people to work on issues about which they are passionate, to the point where they are willing to take some responsibility. This can lead to identifying topics that participants are quite enthusiastic about seeing investigated. Even better, they may be highly motivated to participate in investigating these questions themselves.

Open Space Technology facilitators often suggest to the group that they phrase an issue or opportunity in the form of a question. These original questions may become topics of investigation for community-based research, or additional questions that arise in the breakouts may be more salient. Alternatively, themes that emerge in the closing circle could indicate which questions are on the minds of many people in the group as a whole. If the event lasts for the full two and half days, there is an opportunity for participants to prioritize the issues that came up in the breakout sessions, including research questions.

In my experience, Open Space Technology has been successful for increasing community participation in research. In a one-day meeting that I facilitated in Santa Cruz County, California (with nearly 100 participants) in 2005, for example, two breakout sessions addressed the issue of forming a local food policy council. A food policy council is a body that looks at food in a coordinated way, rather than through different government departments or agencies, such as agriculture, health, environment, social services, etc. These sessions generated much excitement among those who attended, and some followed up with research into councils that had already formed in other areas. Many attendees continued to meet and envision a food policy council that would encompass Santa Cruz and two adjacent counties. They also initiated research projects that would assist with a more coordinated food policy in the region, such as assessing residents' level of access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally-appropriate food.

That meeting also mobilized actions that went beyond research. It helped catalyze and expand two other projects: 1) an initiative to bring local food to school cafeterias, and 2) an effort to prevent the introduction of genetically engineered crops into the county, (the latter project succeeded in the following year) (Rich 2006). Responses to an evaluation form at this event were unanimously positive

about the format. In addition, everyone who responded expressed interest in participating in a future meeting, suggesting that this increased level of participation had the potential to be sustained.

There were major challenges involved in coordinating the event, however. The most difficult was convincing other organizers that it would work. They had little faith that something so different from a traditional meeting format would succeed. Although the organizers were very pleased that the process was successful, due to the lack of control they experienced, most did not express much enthusiasm for using Open Space Technology in follow-up meetings. There is so much freedom in Open Space that it can be a shock for those heavily invested in top-down structures. This can lead to difficulty in appreciating its benefits, at least initially. This may be true for a few participants as well, especially if they are uncomfortable with ambiguity (Mannarini, Fedi, and Trippetti 2010).

Applying the World Café

The World Café process involves discussing a series of questions. Conversations are likely to uncover where knowledge is lacking with respect to these inquiries, and can serve to outline a research agenda. This may result in recognition that the community can answer a research question, or that some of their questions cannot be answered, even by experts. An aspect shared with Open Space Technology is an opportunity for the group as a whole to come together and identify themes that emerged in the smaller groups. This step can be more formal than with Open Space Technology, though, especially if a graphic facilitator creates a visual map of these themes. The World Café facilitator could potentially place an even greater emphasis on identifying research needs for the group as a whole.

The focus of the World Café can be positive, which according to proponents of Appreciative Inquiry, can lead to more rapid changes than a research program that focuses on community deficits. It can also make the event more "fun" and generate enthusiasm for future meetings. A positive approach may also increase the percentage of participants who are willing to become involved throughout the research process. Rachel Aldred (2011), however, has raised an important concern that this is a subtle form of control, as it may discourage participants from raising legitimate complaints about their communities.

One common experience with the World Café is that strong connections are made among participants, and a spirit of teamwork can emerge. This could lead to sense of unity for a participatory research agenda, or even the formation of potential research teams. The essentially random assortment of participants at tables makes

this less likely in larger groups, but it may foster connections between people that would never meet in an Open Space Technology event, thus generating a broader sense of community among participants.

My experience is that the World Café is effective in increasing community participation (I have organized events with more than 100 people), but is less effective in catalyzing action than Open Space Technology or Dynamic Facilitation. An event using the World Café format to explore local food and agricultural issues in Santa Cruz, for example, helped connect people who did not previously know each other, but did not lead to as much concrete progress as the Open Space Technology meeting that preceded it. The World Cafe is less threatening for organizers who are used to command and control meeting structures, however, because it gives them a greater role. Organizers have control of the questions discussed at the tables, and can also use a more formal facilitation style for the whole group conversation. As a result, the World Café is a good first step for those who are initially resistant to utilizing the other two processes, or for those more interested in community input into generating research questions, rather than community participation in the entire research process. After several experiences of seeing the enthusiasm, ideas, and results that come from the more contained chaos of the World Café, organizers may be willing to cede even more control to the group as a whole.

Applying Dynamic Facilitation

Dynamic Facilitation is also very effective for generating a list of questions that may define a research agenda. These questions are recorded on the chart labeled "problems," which is sometimes framed in a more positive way as "inquiries." As with the World Café, the process of dialogue may even encourage groups to reframe their initial questions to address more fundamental issues.

Jim Rough has employed Dynamic Facilitation for what he calls "Wisdom Councils" (2002). These are randomly selected groups of people that come together and, with the help of a Dynamic Facilitator, produce consensus statements around public policy dilemmas. Rough's experiments with Wisdom Councils have been successful, and he has proposed a Constitutional Amendment to institutionalize the process as a result. He has suggested that 24 registered voters be randomly selected each year to craft consensus statements for the United States. The proposed amendment would only require that these statements be communicated to the rest of the population, it would not change the current mechanisms of government. Adoption of the idea has been slow in the in the United States, but it has been

implemented by several municipalities in Austria and has informed their priority setting and planning processes. Most randomly selected citizens are interested in the opportunity to be heard by policy makers, even if a free lunch is the only compensation (Wolf 2011).

A similar approach could be used to help make mainstream and large-scale research more community-based. A randomly selected advisory panel could make recommendations for research topics, applications of the research, or even the research process itself. In Denmark, for example, new technologies like genetically engineered foods and irradiation are evaluated by a panel of 15 citizens who recommend policy guidelines (Atlee 2002).

Because Dynamic Facilitation can lead to a strong group consensus on an issue, it may encourage a willingness to engage in participatory research. Even if participants in a meeting that is dynamically facilitated are very involved in the conversation, however, they may not be as committed as in Open Space meetings, where the law of mobility allows people to leave.

My experience with Dynamic Facilitation is that it is very effective in encouraging active participation and consensus. Although I have only used it for groups of up to 30 people, those who are often very quiet in meetings with a more traditional facilitation format appear more willing to contribute to the discussion. This happens even when the listener/facilitator does not go out of their way to draw people out. When used to explore food and agricultural issues in Santa Cruz County, I observed more group buy-in for creative proposals to affect change than in previous meetings with more top-down facilitation formats.

On the other hand, Dynamic Facilitation engenders the same level of resistance from organizers as Open Space Technology. While it does greatly improve the quality of dialogue in meetings, it may not seem efficient from an organizer's perspective when compared to going through a linear agenda. This is unfortunate because, although it may initially appear to them that more is accomplished with a rigid meeting format, participant enthusiasm is much higher, and the results are more effective, with Dynamic Facilitation. It takes faith to be willing to prioritize a democratic process over the goal of efficiency, because our notion of democracy is so stunted, and most of us have so little experience with bottom-up approaches (Lappé 2007). Convincing reluctant organizers may therefore require conveying success stories from other communities, or modeling the process firsthand in a lower-stakes setting (perhaps repeatedly to overcome deeply-ingrained biases).

Applying Combined Approaches

Because the approaches discussed above have different strengths, combining them may increase their effectiveness for initiating and implementing community-based research. One criticism of Open Space Technology, for example, is that the conversations can often be "transactional," rather than expressing true dialogue (Martin 2002). This means that participants often talk past each other without fully listening to what other people are saying. Integrating Dynamic Facilitation may help participants to engage in deeper conversations, although the time allocated for sessions may need to be longer than is typical for Open Space meetings.

My colleagues and I have experimented with combining Open Space Technology and Dynamic Facilitation twice, and the results were encouraging (Howard et al. 2005). The integration required training student volunteers to serve as Dynamic Facilitation "note takers" for Open Space breakout sessions. This fostered greater engagement from participants by drawing out those who were less willing to speak up in a large group (Dynamic Facilitation), while still giving people the freedom to leave a breakout session (Open Space Technology's law of mobility). In addition, when the Dynamic Facilitator summarized or bookmarked the session, it helped participants to recognize their breakthroughs and bring up action items to a greater extent than in traditional Open Space Technology.

Integrating Dynamic Facilitation also succeeded in creating a written proceedings report and a list of potential research topics in a one-day meeting, which is difficult using Open Space Technology alone (Owen 2008). It could even work for a shorter meeting, such as time allocated for just one breakout session. This is an advantage if organizers want to hold a series of meetings with sustained participation from members of a community, rather than a one-time event. Multiple meetings would help ensure the continuity of long-term community-based research projects.

Open Space Technology has also been successfully combined the World Café. For example, a city in Australia blended the two to involve the community in planning a new cultural center. Essentially, they introduced the four guiding principles of Open Space Technology, as well as the Law of Mobility, to the World Café process. After holding two such events, major changes were made to the plan, such as reintroducing a performing arts center that was cut due to perceived budgetary constraints, and making the plaza outside the building suitable for outdoor concerts and a drop-in area for youth (Stewart 2001).

All three of these approaches could even be used together. One possibility would be to hold a World Café event to identify positive visions of the future. This could

be directly followed with implementing Open Space Technology, and if volunteers willing to serve as Dynamic Facilitators were trained and available, they could serve as the note takers.

DISCUSSION

Open Space Technology, the World Café, and Dynamic Facilitation have great potential for increasing community participation in research. This increased participation comes with a cost of increased time spent in meetings, and modest additional funding and/or training. Perhaps the bigger price, however, is the loss of the organizer's influence on the outcomes. Owen has suggested that Open Space Technology, for example, is not for those who "wish to remain in total control" (2007:145). Control is instead handed over to the participants, who self-organize the outcomes that are of greatest interest to them. Use of these processes may lead to a broader community research agenda or greater community engagement in research, for example, but they also may fail to result in community-based research!

This may be a challenge for those of us who come to community engagement from a strong research perspective (Bartunek 2007). The training and skills we wish to employ to assist communities when initiating community-based research efforts may not be utilized if a community prioritizes other outcomes. The tensions between traditional research goals and community goals have been well described (Strand et al. 2003), and many community-based researchers are prepared to accept that research may play a much smaller role than action. Still, are we willing to invest heavily in initiating an effort, only to allow our interests and our strengths to the fall completely to the wayside?

As painful as this might be, viewed from another perspective it might be the best possible outcome. In effect, the community here will have experienced what Paulo Friere called *conscientization*, where a more in-depth understanding of the world is achieved by trying to change it (1990). As mentioned above, the meetings themselves could be viewed as research when we take this wider perspective. Yet the outcomes of self-organizing processes may also lead more directly to the underlying goals of community-based research, rather than research per se. Even when these processes do not lead to any immediately recognizable outcomes, they are likely to increase connections among community members, which can in turn increase the potential for social change (Granovetter 2005; Obstfeld 2005). Besides building stronger social networks, these processes are likely to encourage understanding of other perspectives, and building on community strengths.

CONCLUSION

Self-organizing processes may be best suited for the most difficult problems. If the community issue is relatively straightforward, it can be addressed with traditional research methods, and with little direct community involvement, these methods are probably not the most appropriate. For problems that are not so tame, however, the use of Open Space Technology, the World Café, Dynamic Facilitation, and/or related methods can increase community participation, and potentially participants' effectiveness in addressing them. As more community members connect and share information, the likelihood that they will see the bigger picture increases. It is a common experience that their thinking then shifts to ask, "How can we collectively move in a more positive direction?" Sometimes this leads to discrete community-based research projects, sometimes it does not. When it does not, we should be ready to see the bigger picture as well, and celebrate the movement that occurs, wherever it may take us.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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