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## Idealized Design of A Leadership from the Middle Process

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Stankard, Martin F. (2011) "Learning to Lead from the Middle", Presentation to INFORMS Northeastern Regional Conference May 6-8, 2011, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts

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#### Idealized Design of A Leadership from the Middle Process

#### Abstract

This slide presentation describes the origin, approach and deliverables of course Org. Dynm.633, on "Leadership from the Middle" (LftM). Course participants were middle managers taking responsibility without authority for producing results in uncertain organizational environments, under high pressure. This course involved students in analyzing their current organizational challenges and realities and then in designing an idealized leadership approach in class. Between classes students adapted the class idealized design to their own opportunities and challenges. The course had two phases; analyzing the current reality followed by the design of an idealized general LftM process. After using the nominal group technique to define class learning objectives; the current reality analysis involved using system thinking tools to analyze, and project a base case of the opportunities and challenges assuming no change in trends. The idealized design involved using group facilitation techniques such as brainstorming, affinity diagramming, process mapping, nominal group technique, prioritization matrices and others to design and validate the version 1.0 LftM process against top priority requirements. Based on the validation results, the class added and dropped elements of the idealized design to produce a version 2.0 idealized LftM process design. The presentation includes a flowchart of the third and final LftM process design and identifies next steps for further development of LftM.

#### Keywords

Leadership, Mid-organization, Legitimacy, Idealized Design, Systems Thinking, Power, Influence, Organizational Change, Process Design

#### Disciplines

Business Administration, Management, and Operations | Entrepreneurial and Small Business Operations | Organizational Behavior and Theory

#### Comments

Stankard, Martin F. (2011) "Learning to Lead from the Middle", Presentation to INFORMS Northeastern Regional Conference May 6-8, 2011, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts

### LEARNING TO LEAD FROM THE MIDDLE

**A PRESENTATION TO THE** 

INFORMS NORTHEASTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE MAY 7-8, 2011 AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS

Martin F. Stankard, Ph.D. Affiliated Faculty, University of Pennsylvania Center for Organizational Dynamics (978)-692-1818



## Background

- Organizational Dynamics at Penn
  - Graduate degree program for mid-career and advanced professionals (M.S., M.Phil.)
    - 400 professional working adults with min of 5+ years of full-time management or executive level experience (most have 10+ years)
    - 50 Penn faculty representing 17 academic domains and Six of Penn Schools
  - Focuses on the art and science of organizational change
  - Author teaches MS course on Process Improvement Strategies and Tools

Dynamics 633-10c class members who participated in developing content in this presentation

- Daniel Alonzo
- Tonita Bell
- Brent Buford
- Michael Falkie
- Diego Gomez-Abrahams
- Scott Larmore
- Richard McGreal
- Erica Wexler
- Joshua Zimmerman

## Origin of LftM course

- Demand arose spontaneously from top students in previous process improvement classes – Examples of "voice of the student:"
  - "I took your course on Process Improvement because I thought my department suffered from poor processes. Now I realize that we suffer from a lack of leadership and have concluded that I must become the leader that I have been searching for."
  - "I am tired of waiting for the top management to set direction and lead. Please tell me how can I lead from the middle?"
  - How can I take the initiative for necessary changes when my department head opposes changes that do not come down from higher ups?
  - How can I establish the legitimacy of changes I know we need to make when I am not responsible for several areas that must be involved in those changes?

## Course development timeline

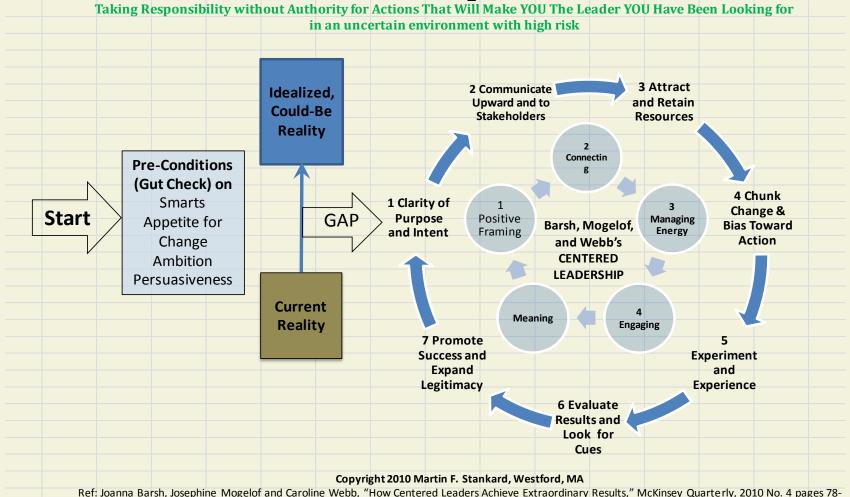
- Spring and Summer, 2010 -- Course designed and developed
  - Literature search turned up little on LftM, but many articles relevant to narrower aspects of topic
- First class offered Fall, 2010;
  - Required texts: Heath and Heath, Switch how to change things when change is hard; also Made to Stick.
  - Most course readings assignments were articles published in *Organization Science* and *Academy of Management* publications
    - Conservation and amplification of organizational power;
    - Dynamics of action-oriented problem solving;
    - Legitimization,
    - Social construction of leader-follower relationships;
    - Organizational citizenship behavior and others.
- Course listed for Fall, 2011

## Key terms

- Leadership from the Middle -- Middle managers taking responsibility without authority for producing results in uncertain organizational environments, under high pressure. (Source: Class's description of the course content on last day of course)
- Idealized Design -- A group design process first employed at Bell Telephone Labs in the 1950s to design the ideal Bell System and its closest feasible approximation.
  - Idealized design ("design thinking") popularized by Russell Ackoff from the sixties to 2009. According to Ackoff its principles are:
    - Solving all problems in as-is organizational situation does not yield better system
    - Achieving the best that could and should be (ideal situation) requires design unbounded by current constraints.
    - Replacing current problematic situation (mess) by the closest feasible approximation to the idealized design yields greatest feasible improvement.
  - Idealized Design involves all stakeholders in a messy problem situation in:
    - Designing their *ideal present* (what they would wish for, if all their wishes came true today.) This is very, very difficult for them.
    - Ensuring that all design elements used are feasible, sustainable, and adaptable to changing requirements.

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### The final product: LftM = A proven leadership model driving action-learning LftM Simplified

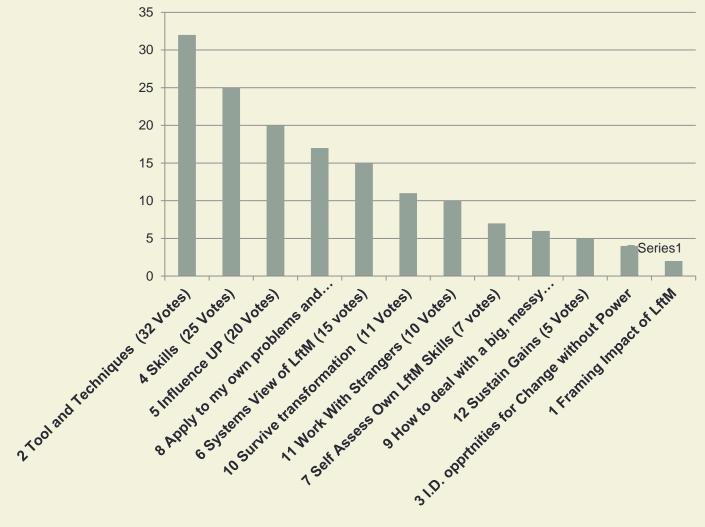


## Affinity diagram of class "care abouts"

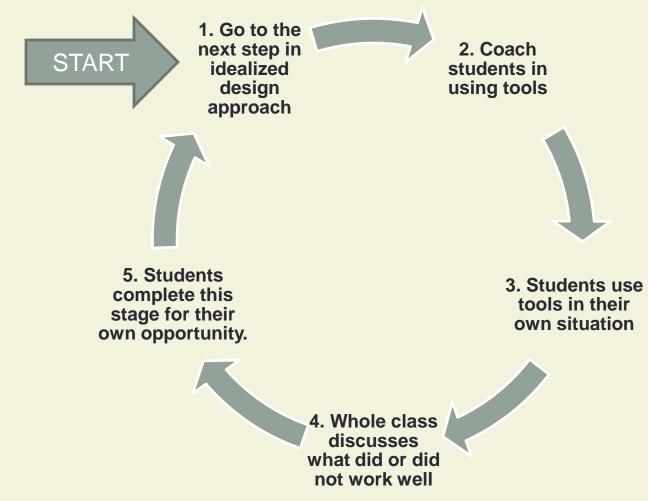
#### Affinity Diagram of Individual Learning Objectives from Dynm633 Class 1 Nominal Group Session

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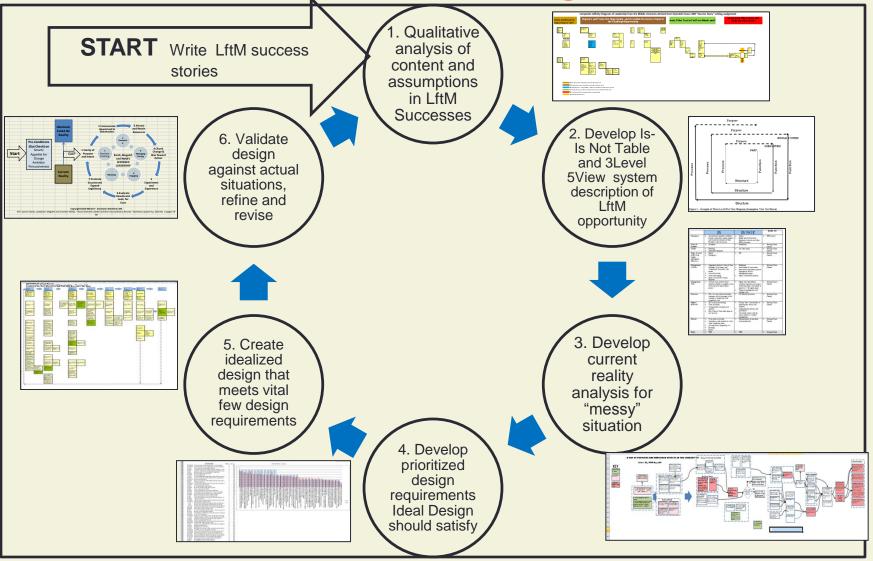
# Class learning objectives (from Nominal Group Technique)



# Basic instructional cycle repeated 6x during course



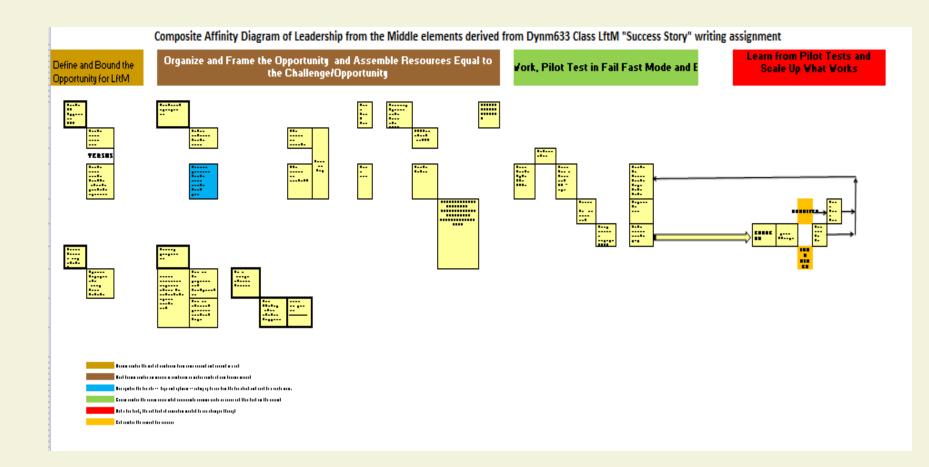
## Overall LftM course design



## Approach Step 1 Identify elements in LftM success (qualitative analysis of success stories)

- Inventory elements of LftM successes
  - Each student wrote a detailed narrative of a real opportunity as a success story.
    - Fiction allowed if needed to make the story successful
    - Students identified all assumptions necessary for the story's success.
- Involve class in identifying "moving parts" of LftM situations
  - Students present stories to peers who prepare Post it Note on each story element at a "what it is/does" level of detail
- Create affinity diagram of LftM success elements by arranging all Post-it notes in time sequence (see next page)

# Elements of LftM success stories in approximate time sequence



# Approach Step 2 – system description of scope and moving parts of LftM opportunity

- Whole class develops a system description of a LftM opportunity or challenge
  - Is Is/Not Table defines scope
    - Entries in Is/Is-Not table based on LftM elements from previous step
  - 3Level 5View Iterative description of the opportunity as a system at 3 Levels
    - Focal level: The LftM opportunity itself;
    - Containing level: The organizational system containing the opportunity;
    - Contained level: The stakeholders and subsystems that make up the opportunity
    - 5 Views
      - 1. **Function:** What results from the as-is system (job, process, challenge, opportunity),
      - 2. **Structure:** What are the parts of the system,
      - 3. **Process:** How the parts work together as a process,
      - 4. Purpose: What is this level's mission within higher level system containing it,
      - 5. Assumptions: what assumptions must hold for successful working of system?
- Students then describe their own opportunities as a system, form into small groups to share and discuss

## Example: Scope definition Is/Is-Not Table

#### PRO FORMA IS/IS NOT TABLE FOR Opportunity to Lead Change from Mid Organization

	IS	IS NOT
	Containing Organization	
Culture	Non-profit, client service, action oriented	Innovative, agile or permissive
Critical Values and Strategic Priorities	Expand program coverage, increase program participation and success rate, be seen as valued resource	Profit seeking or competing for demand already served by for-profit organizations.
Chain of command	Board of Directors, Board of Advisors, Executive Director and professional staff	Highly formal, nor highly oriented toward accountability
Organizational Units and Partners	Many volunteers, with excellent working relationships between programs and volunteers	Proposing new links or relationships with volunteers and the organization
Impacted Processes	Working relationships between programs and client companies/supporters	Proposing entirely new links or relationships with volunteers
Measures of success on the Critical Values & Strategic Priorities	Aimed at improving rate of current client company participation in programs	Proposing to expand client base with new relationships
Impacted Policies	Working relationships between organization staff, volunteers, and participant companies	Leaving existing links and relationships unchanged

### Iterative sequence use to develop 3-Level, 5-View system description (Assumptions – 5th view not shown)

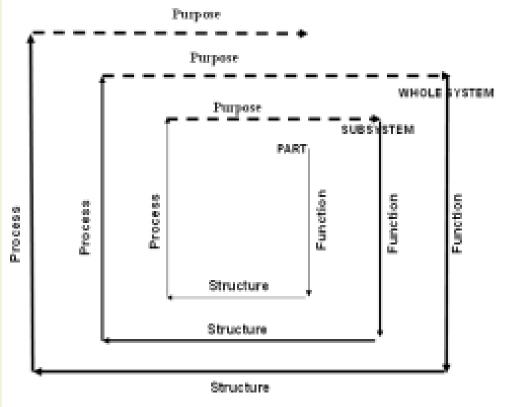


Figure 1 - Example of Three Level Five View Diagram (Assumption View Not Shown)

# Example – First (stakeholder) level of a triadic system description

Level 1: View of LftM Opportunity Level -- Group of people who see an opportunity to lead change from the middle

#### **FUNCTION**

- The stakeholders working on the issue should validate and build a case for collaborating on the opportunity for change.
- They should next self-assess their group membership and identify any additional stakeholders who need to be involved in discussions of the identified change opportunity.

#### PROCESS

- The stakeholder group should agree upon and pool data supporting the need for change.
- The data should be validated from two perspectives:
  - Does addressing this issue add value to our the organizational level we are all members of?
  - · Does addressing this issue add value to us as stakeholders?
- Gain an outside opinion of the value added by addressing this issue.
- The case should be reframed to accommodate all objections raised during the validation process.
- At this point, the group should re-assess the group membership.
- The opportunity should be partitioned into themes.

#### STRUCTURE

- Plan on 15-20 minutes of airtime for discussion per person.
- To enable full participation in larger groups, form subgroups for discussion.
- Each sub-group reports out the themes identified to the whole group.

#### PURPOSE

• To identify success for the company at a higher level by developing and utilizing the talents and skills of the stakeholders involved in the change opportunity as framed.

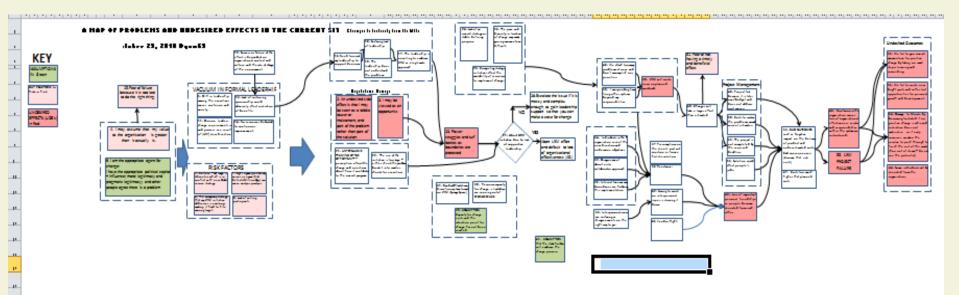
#### ASSUMPTIONS

- There is an actual real opportunity for change.
- The group has identified all the right people to involve.
- The group will be able to bring in all the right people if they are not already at the table.
- This is a high-leverage opportunity (small input, big output).
- The group will be able to implement the decisions it comes up with.
- All who accept the validity of the case also accept the validity of the data used to make the case.

### Approach Step 3 – Analyze current reality and project future for "messy" system

- Identify problems, invalid assumptions, risk factors, barriers to progress and undesired effects (UDEs) in the current reality
- Organize each problem and UDE into a cause and effect flow chart of current reality
- Project cause and effect trends to describe likely future outcomes (assuming no change occurs).
  - Usual base case forecast (no change in current trends) is for a very undesirable future

## Map of problems and undesired effects (UDE) in the current reality



Legend:

-12

 Assumptions are shown with green fill Gut reactions to risk are shown in light pink Undesired Effects (UDEs) are shown in dark pink

## Approach Step 4 – Develop and prioritize design requirements for idealized LftM design

- Brainstorm design requirements suggested by the current reality analysis
- Affinity and group design requirements into categories such as:
  - Aesthetics, Leadership behaviors, Change management, Managing up, Risk management, Politics, Network maintenance, etc.
- Create prioritization matrix for design requirements (Next slide)
- Students rate requirements for their situation
  - 0 = Does not apply; 1 = Nice to have; 3 = Important to have; 7 = Must have.
- Combine ratings across individuals and sort requirements from Hi to Lo

## **Portion of requirements prioritization** matrix (Excel spreadsheet)

	📕 🖉 🖉	_										
1	1 Mission, Objectives and Values of Ideal LftM Approach									Class Tota Mee	dian <i>i</i>	Average
28 3.3.2.3.	Clearly communicate the goal of what we are trying to do	7	3.0	7	7	7	7	7		45	7	6.4
57 3.9.3.1.	Positive framing of our problem; how a solution will make eve	7	3.0	7		7	7	7		45	7	6.4
15 3.1.	Frame problem or opportunity positively	7	3.0	7	7	7	3	7		41	7	5.9
50 3.9.1.	Cognitive legitimacy of solutions (explain why they are better	7	7.0	7		3	3	7		41	7	5.9
72 4.2.	Celebrate small successes to boost morale and sustain momer	7	3.0	7	7	7	3	7		41	7	5.9
35 3.5.	Address people's fears about Undesired Effects	7	3.0	7	7	7	1	7		39	7	5.6
46 3.7.4.	Have the right people at the table	3	7.0	7	7	7	1	7		39	7	5.6
56 3.9.3.	Pragmatic legitimacy	7	7.0	7		7	3	7		38	7	6.3
621	The ideal LftM approach should be simple, sticky, easy to follo	7	3.0	7	-	7	3	3		37	7	5.3
23 3.3.1.	Communicate the purpose (to address false assumptions.)	7	3.0	7	7	7	3	3		37	7	5.3
24 3.3.1.1.	Ensure clarity of intent	7	3.0	7	7	7	3	3		37	7	5.3
36 3.5.1.	The person leading from the middle must believe the approad	3	3.0	7	7	7	7	3		37	7	5.3
49 3.9.	Maintain Legitimacy	3	3.0	7	7	7	3	7		37	7	5.3
61 3.9.3.5.	Seek out and use "bright spots" of best practices in other place	7	7.0	7	1	7	1	7		37	7	5.3
73 4.2.1.	Credit people with successes	7	3.0	7		7	3	3		37	7	5.3
18 3.2.	Gain acknowledgement of problem	7	3.0	7		3	1	7		35	7	5.0
21 3.2.3.	Be honest about knowledge of the problem	7	3.0	7	7	7	3	1		35	7	5.0
39 3.6.	Secure engaged sponsorship	3	7.0	7	7	1	3			35	7	5.0
48 3.8.1.	Clear definitions of roles and responsibilities	3	1.0			-	7	3			7	5.0
64 4.1.1.	Staff must be willing to make change in current paradigm	3	1.0 3.0	3		7	- 7	7		35	- 7	5.0 4.9
40 3.6.1.	Leadership must agree that there is a critical problem Help senior leadership understand the problem	3	3.0			0				34	- 7	4.9
32 3.4.2.	Focus on sustainability rather than immediate short term solu	3	3.0	1	7	OI.	71	21	т т т	24	21	3.4
37 3.5.2.	Identify defensive behaviors (such as avoidance, blaming or so	3	0.0	7	7	1		2		24	3	3.4
9 2.2.		3	0.0	3	-	7		3		24	3	3.1
	Lean and unobtrusive						3	-				
75 4.2.3.	Clarify responsibilities for doers or SMEs within "the new mod	3	3.0	3		3	3	3		21	3	3.0
4 1.3.	Establish performance measures that establish trust first, ther	3	3.0	1	-	7	3	3		20	3	2.9
45 3.7.3.	Capture Resources	3	0.0	7	_	3	1	3		20	3	2.9
47 3.8.	Use social mechanisms to define roles (work out agreements of	1	0.0	7	3	3	3	3		20	3	2.9
65 4.1.1.1	People must agree to "fight fair" and stick to agreed issues	3	0.0	7	3	3	3	1		20	3	2.9
12 2.3.1.	Align effort with parallel efforts/approaches such as Lean Six \$	7	3.0	3	1	1	1	3		19	3	2.7
26 3.3.2.1.	Acknowledge and consider interpersonal dynamics during con	3	1.0	3	7	1	1	3		19	3	2.7
27 3.3.2.2.	Have multiple conversations with peers	3	3.0	3		3	3	1		19	3	2.7
29 3.3.2.4		7	1.0	3	_	3		3		19	3	2.7
		-	1.0	3		3					3	
69 4.1.3.2.	Make use of existing elements such as Lean Six Sigma	3			-	3		3		18		2.6
70 4.1.4.	Take compounding effects into consideration	1	0.0	7		1	1	l		18	1	2.6
44 3.7.2.	Influence other departments or units to dedicate resources	3	0.0	3		1	3	3		14	3	2.0
13 2.4	Continue external benchmarking with veteran companies	3	3.0	1		3	1			11	3	1.8
71				7						7	7	7.0
5	2 Aesthetics and agility of Ideal LftM Approach									0	0	
14	3 Functional Requirements (What the Ideal LftM approach must	do)								0	0	
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62 4 Create an environment of "continuous improvement."

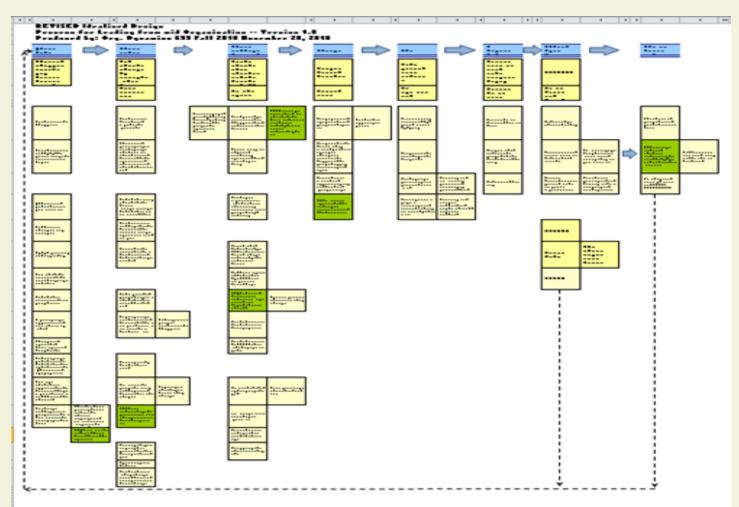
## **Prioritization of design requirements**

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## Approach Step 5 – Created idealized design that meets "vital few" design requirements

- Students brainstorm idealized "how to" approaches they would wish for if they could have any approach that is:
  - 1. **Technically feasible,** does not require new technologies or methods, but relies on bright spots that already exist..
  - 2. **Sustainable** in the current environment and will not elicit destructive opposition or push-back inside or outside the organization.
  - 3. Agile and adaptable as requirements, conditions or environment change.
- Arrange and integrate ideal "how-to's" into version 1 idealized design.

### Version 1 idealized design LftM process



Green items were created as needed to make the flow of how-to items logical and complete

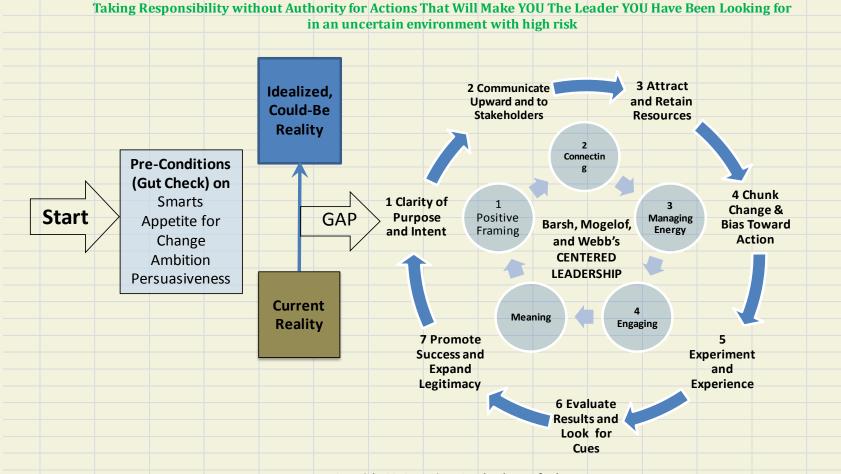
## Approach Step 6 – Validate Idealized Design against vital few requirements and revise

- Each student checked v.1 idealized design against his or her opportunity to identify:
  - "Drops" non-value-added activities which may be deleted and
  - "Adds" or needed changes (that conform to the three design conditions)
- Whole class examines and rates all proposed Adds and Drops as before and sorts design changes from highest total priority rating to lowest
- Revise V1.0 design with highest priority additions and deletions and integrate into V2.0 idealized design (not shown)

## Step 6 – Verify Idealized Design against vital few requirements in actual situations to generate "add and drop" ideas for revision

		Phase		
adds	provide vision - build a case for change among colleagues		drops	hold focus group or intent workshop in beginning - overkill
				parking lot place where ideas go to die - by itself, not useful, culutre of organization needs
ədds	ensure guiding principles being used for key decisions	1	drops	to be taken into account to determine value (will it ever be addressed)
				drop mission statement - company/organization already has one, so more important to focu
				on purpose/intent vs a genericized "mission" (need to link TEAM mission back to organization
adds	generate more individualized conversations	througho		MISSION,)
adds	train team members in process improvement, metrics, etc	3	drops	create clarity from complexity (if opporunity is not complex)
				surveying for suggestions/recommendations may not be best feedback loop (post event is
adds	consider bringing in outside expertise		drops	valuable, but up front not value added)
adds	knowledge sharing with others stores/entities	5	drops	surveying employee satisfaction to evaluate/check against stated goals/purpose
	find people who have 'what you need' to make the LftM possible - attract &			
	influence new resources including people & subject matter/process experts (of			
adds	that area)		drops	agree on respectable behaviors (it is a given)
adds	consider new uses for existing resources	5	drops	do not put disproportional emphasis on benchmarking unless a valid comparison
	develop key metrics - balanced between various stakeholder groups - process			collection & publication of performance metrics (too many metrics, situation changes so muc
adds	areas have different key measures - develop common language?	1	drops	measures out of date)
	motivate innovation to achieve results that offer clear competitive advantage,			
	not just 'me too' Solutions, especially addressing conventional obstacles (focus			
adds	on big change, not incremental)	5	drops	focus on human values (for process driven organizations - may not be valued)
adds	ensure we improve not just parts of system but whole system	1	drops	legitimacy needs to be everywhere, not just one step of process
				prototype portfolio may not be effective (too many activities drain resources) - use with car
adds	small changes first to build legitimacy -fly under radar initially	4 or 7	drops	or focus on biggest opportunity or one with highest probability of success
				create understanding of potential outcome if we change now, vs delaying change to later (gu
adds	bring into light hidden agends of adversaries	througho	drops	check up front vs. halfway through process)
	work with the team you have - find what motivates the individuals you have on			use of "external" experts - people in organization may know more than consultants from
adds	team (or get rid of them)	3 through	drops	outside
adds	add or focus on incentives for stakeholders	7 or 8	drops	ensure "keep them working" is valued added & supports team goals/objectives
	revisit parking lot periodically to see if deferred opportunities may help drive			
adds	more engagement Or support process/change more than initially seen	througho	ut	
	id and define assumptions - actively seek any contradictions, bring to front for			
adds	discussion	througho	ut	
adds	use of organization's mandatory tools (RACI, SIPOC, etc)	3		
adds	agreement about specifications that need to be met for prototyping	3		
adds	confirm original solution/business case is still valid (addresses original issue)	7		
	communicate revised solution as needed to frame it as a positive learning			
adds	experience	7	,	
0000	align roles, responsibilities, performance measures and jobs to support			
adds	realization of goals (every task should align to a stated purpose/intent)	3		
adds	who has responsibility for feedback? Change agent, "changee?"	througho		
5555	scope will evolve over time, indicators/measures have to be modified over time	0		
ədds	(test against stated purpose/intent)	6 or 7		
adds	Documentation of improved procedures, success stories, etc.	788		
adds	utilize existing/accepted performance metrics where possible	2 2		
adds	assess political landscape before you start	1		
8005	assess pontical landscape before you start			
adds	focus on pain if we remain in current state (ie consequences of doing nothing?)	1		
adds	use flat hierarchy of decision making (how do we improve cycle time?)	3& will e		

## The final design after third iteration LftM Simplified



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Ref: Joanna Barsh, Josephine Mogelof and Caroline Webb, "How Centered Leaders Achieve Extraordinary Results," McKinsey Quarterly, 2010 No. 4 pages 78-

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# A next step – incorporating cultural and political toolkits into the LftM process

Cultural and political toolkits

- Cultural toolkits created by social activists or changes in the environment -help people create opportunities to challenge institutionalized status quos they find unfair or wrong:
  - Injustice framings ways to explain how an institutionalized status quo is unfair or illegitimate for a "we."
    - EX: From higher pay for breadwinners (men's pay >> women's pay) to equal pay for equal work (men's pay = women's pay.)
  - Alternative identities ways to redefine expectations for change by using alternative racial, sexual, gender, religious practices to empower people to reject a status quo that demeans them.
    - EX: Workers formerly identified as "hourly workers" may appropriate the identity of "colleagues" or "associates" and adopt appropriate new behaviors.
  - Contentious tactics practices that individuals in an organization can draw upon to challenge the status quo and its defenders.
    - EX: Borrowing tactics from other social movements to challenge some aspect of the status quo.

Political toolkits

 Accessing influential higher ups or to organizational subsystems for staffing decisions, pay, promotion, privilege and punishment that create a sense of security about change and help people coordinate change efforts.

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