

# LEARNING TO LEAD FROM THE MIDDLE

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**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

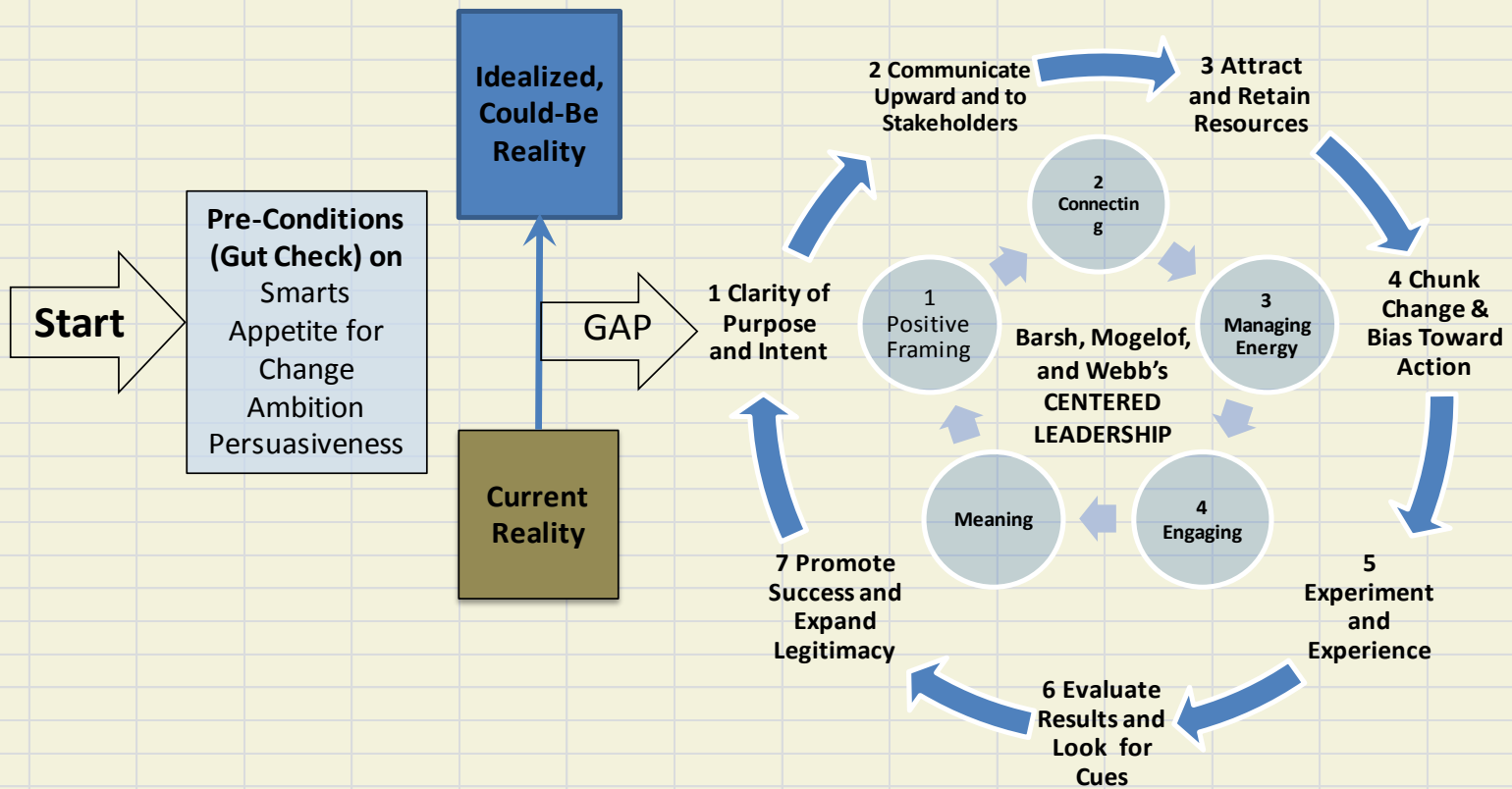
# Key terms

- **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.

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

## LftM Simplified

Taking Responsibility without Authority for Actions That Will Make YOU The Leader YOU Have Been Looking for in an uncertain environment with high risk



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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-

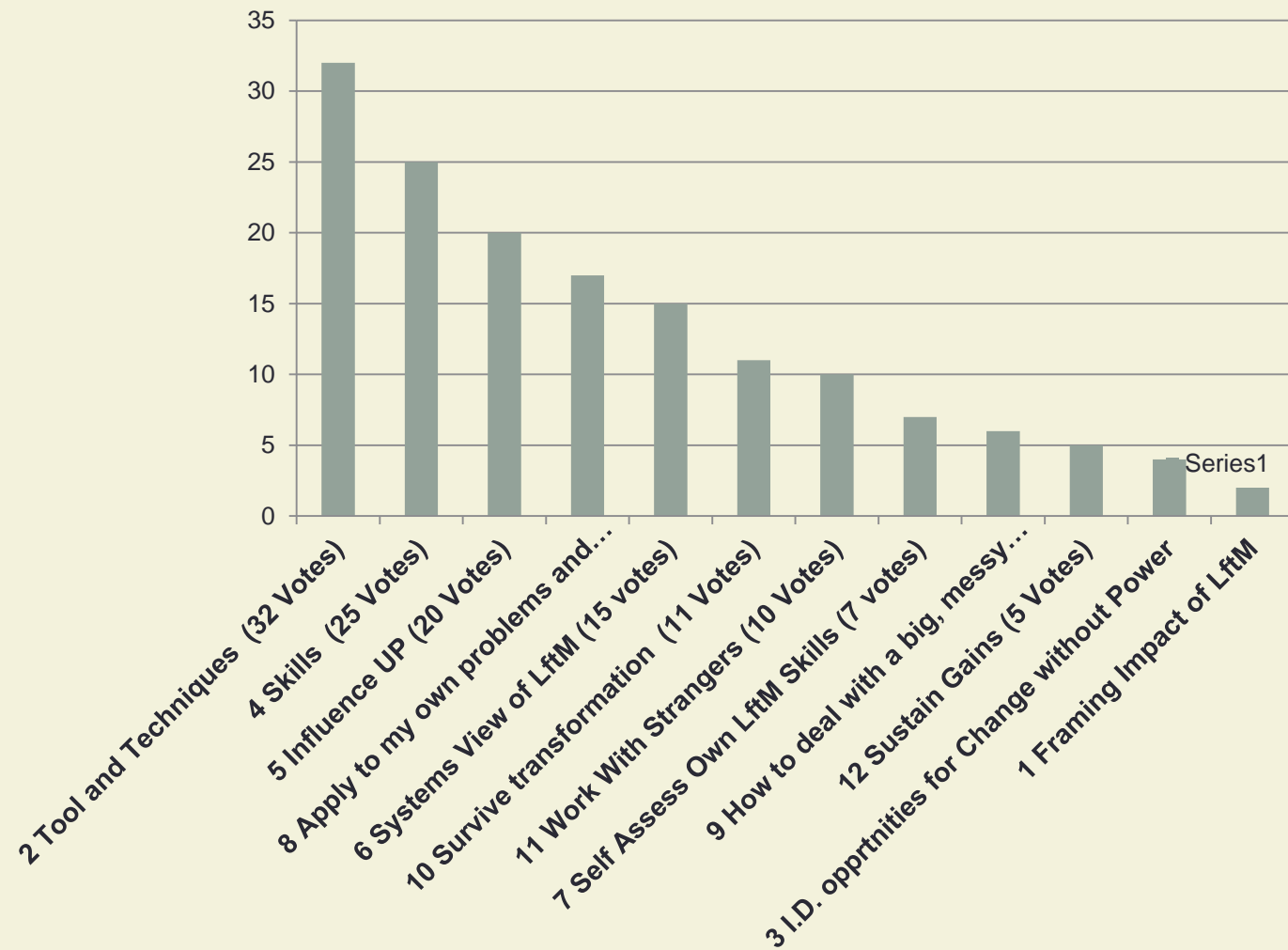
# Affinity diagram of class “care abouts”

Affinity Diagram of Individual Learning Objectives from Dym633 Class 1 Nominal Group Session

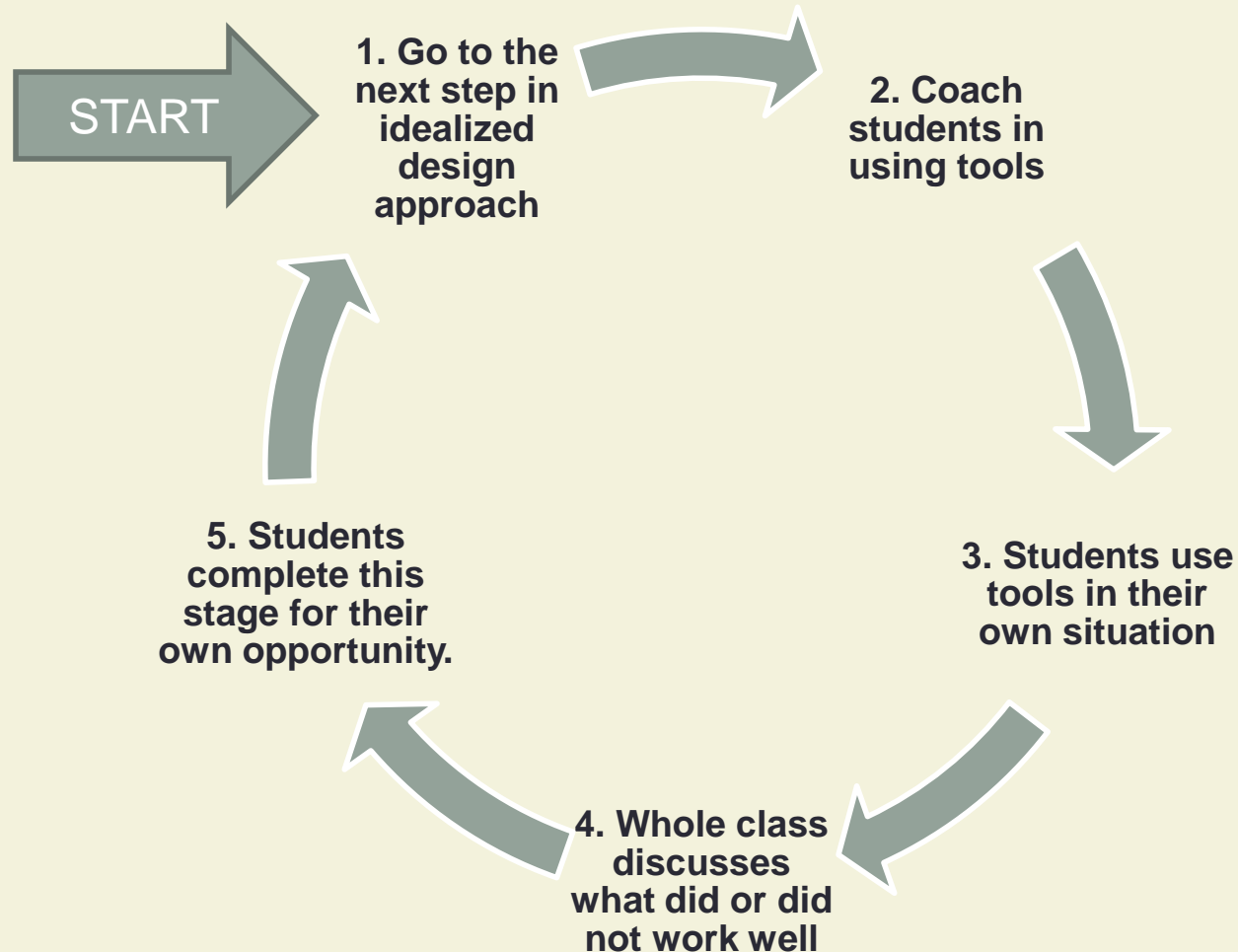
<p><b>1 Framing Impact of LGHM [2 Value]</b></p>	<p><b>2 Tool and Techniques [32 Value]</b></p>	<p><b>3 Influence HP [28 Value]</b></p>	<p><b>4 Apply to my own problems and opportunities [12 Value]</b></p>	<p><b>5 How to deal with a big, messy organization [6 Value]</b></p>	<p><b>6 Sustains Gains [5 Value]</b></p>
<p>How to explain what leading from the middle is</p> <p>Using stories and experiences of the class to</p>	<p>Learn techniques to lead from the middle</p> <p>Learn concrete techniques and methodologies to lead</p> <p>Learn tools that help with better decision making</p> <p>Learn and apply of metrics and tools that middle managers can use to be effective, make better</p>	<p>How to link LGHM with a common purpose and strategy</p> <p>Skills to transfer leadership from the Middle</p> <p>To learn to influence positive change while dealing with</p>	<p>Effective communication on strategy useful for managers leading from the middle</p> <p>Dr. Keller able to influence the organization</p> <p>How to bring new ideas forward</p> <p>Successful tools and techniques for influencing change</p> <p>Specific metrics to use to measure improvement</p>	<p>Skills that increase my ability to organize</p> <p>Learn tools that help with better decision making</p>	<p>Be able to deal effectively with a large, increasingly complicated organization</p> <p>Be able to deal with intractable people in complex organizations</p>
<p><b>3 Identify Opportunities to Enhance Results w/8 Formal Power and Influence [4 value]</b></p>	<p><b>4 Skills [25 Value]</b></p>	<p><b>5 Systems View of LGHM [15 value]</b></p>	<p><b>7 Self Assess Own LGHM Skills [7 value]</b></p>	<p><b>8 Superior Transformation [11 Value]</b></p>	<p><b>11 Work With Strangers [10 Value]</b></p>
<p>How to identify opportunities to negotiate the organization</p> <p>Dr. Keller able to achieve results without power</p>	<p>Skills that increase my ability to recognize the need for -- and to --</p> <p>Learn concrete techniques and methodologies to lead</p> <p>Learn tools that help with better decision making</p>	<p>Assumptions and implications for managers operating in ABC</p> <p>Obtain a practical understanding of how a system process can be implemented in real in day-to-day organizations I have.</p>	<p>How to recognize your own contributions to thinking behavior</p> <p>Self Assessment</p> <p>Dr. Keller understanding of my own learning and development needs through self</p>	<p>How to enhance organizational transformation initiatives</p>	<p>How to lead when you are new to the team you are leading.</p>



# Class learning objectives (from Nominal Group Technique)



# Basic instructional cycle repeated 6x during course



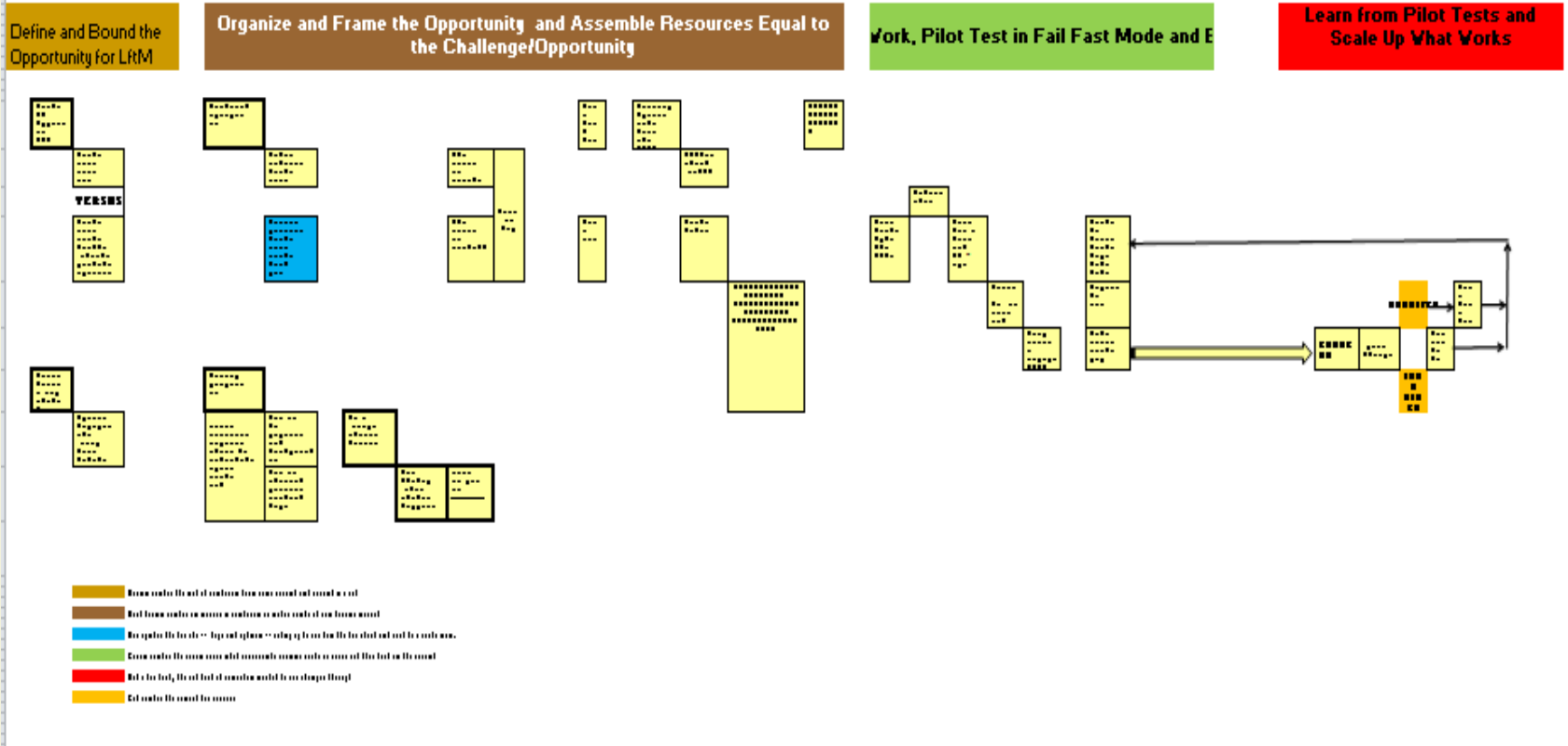


## Approach Step 1 Identify elements in LftM success (qualitative analysis of success stories)

- 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

Composite Affinity Diagram of Leadership from the Middle elements derived from Dym633 Class LftM "Success Story" writing assignment



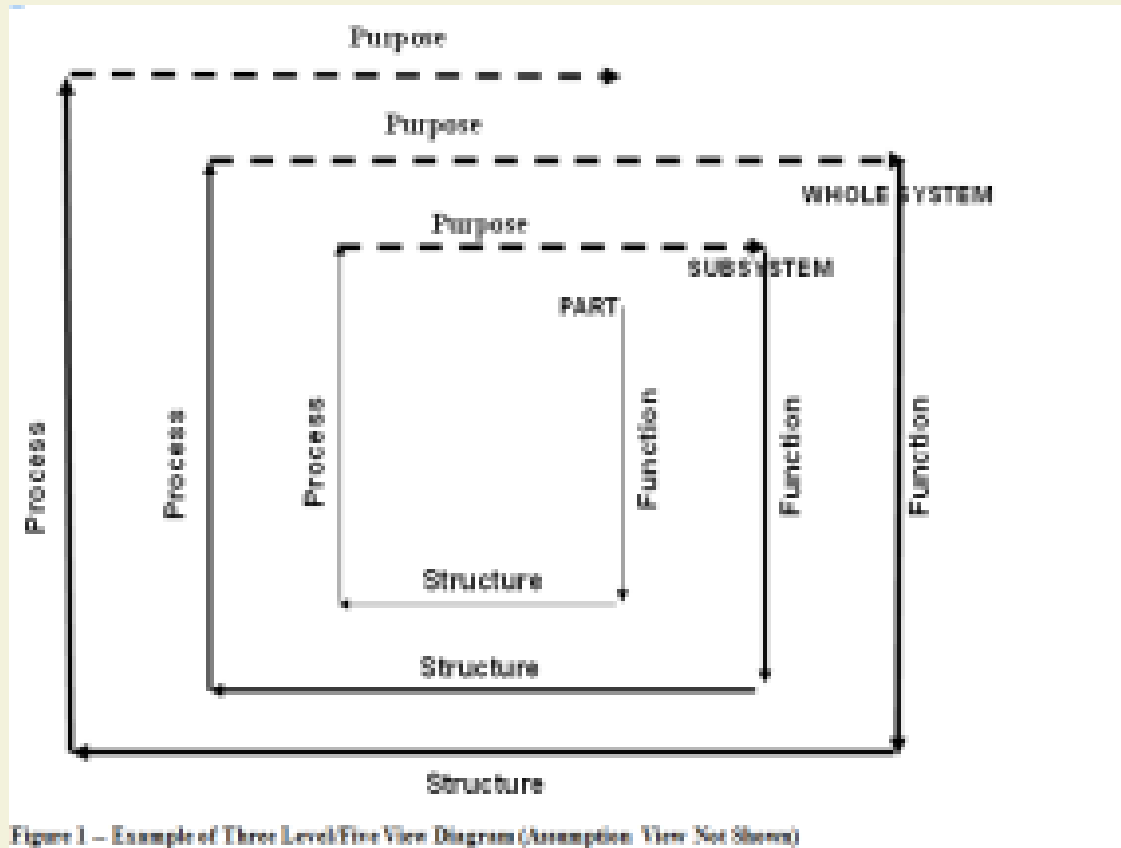
## Approach Step 2 – system description of scope and moving parts of LftM opportunity

- 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
<b>Containing Organization</b>		
<b>Culture</b>	Non-profit, client service, action oriented	Innovative, agile or permissive
<b>Critical Values and Strategic Priorities</b>	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.
<b>Chain of command</b>	Board of Directors, Board of Advisors, Executive Director and professional staff	Highly formal, nor highly oriented toward accountability
<b>Organizational Units and Partners</b>	Many volunteers, with excellent working relationships between programs and volunteers	Proposing new links or relationships with volunteers and the organization
<b>Impacted Processes</b>	Working relationships between programs and client companies/supporters	Proposing entirely new links or relationships with volunteers
<b>Measures of success on the Critical Values &amp; Strategic Priorities</b>	Aimed at improving rate of current client company participation in programs	Proposing to expand client base with new relationships
<b>Impacted Policies</b>	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)





# 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.

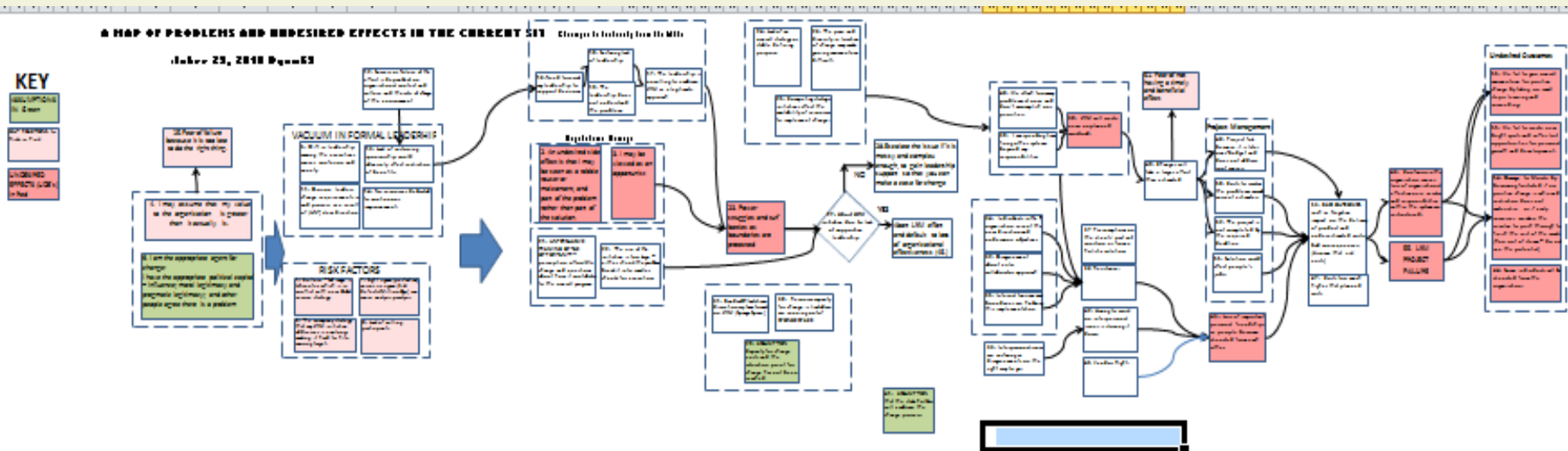
## **ASSUMPTIONS**

- 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:

Assumptions are shown with green fill

Gut reactions to risk are shown in light pink

Undesired Effects (UDEs) are shown in dark pink

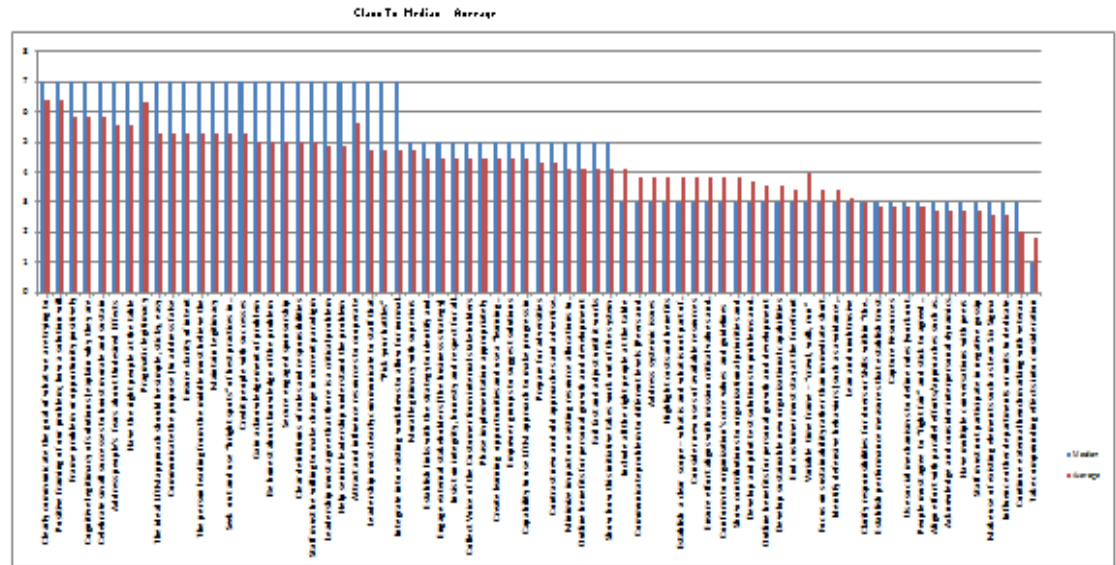
## Approach Step 4 – Develop and prioritize design requirements for idealized LftM design

- 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



# Prioritization of design requirements

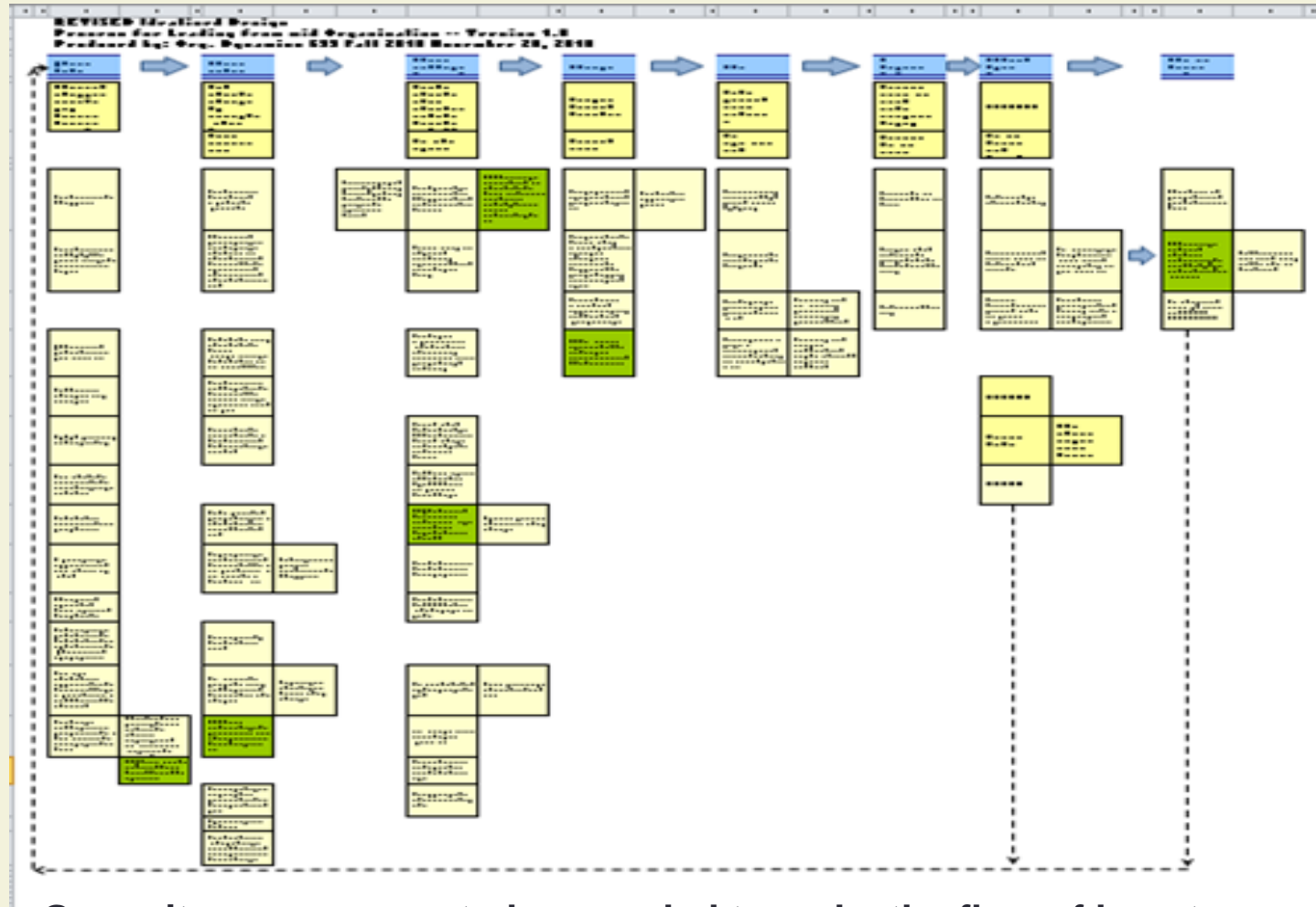
REQ	REQUIREMENT	Median	Average
181			
182			
183	28 3.3.2.3. Clearly communicate the goal of what we are trying to do	7	6.4
184	57 3.3.3.1. Positive framing of new problem; how a solution will make r	7	6.4
185	15 3.1.1. Frame problem as opportunity positively	7	5.3
186	58 3.3.1. Cognitive legitimizing of solution (explain why they are bott	7	5.3
187	72 4.2. Celebrate small successes to build morale and maintain mo	7	5.3
188	35 3.5. Address people's fears about Unfinished Efforts	7	5.6
189	46 3.7.4. Have the right people at the table	7	5.6
190	56 3.3.3. Pragmatic legitimizing	7	6.3
191	6 2.1. The ideal LHM approach should be simple, slick, easy to fo	7	5.3
192	23 3.3.1. Communicate the purpose (to address false assumptions.)	7	5.3
193	24 3.3.1.1. Ensure clarity of intent	7	5.3
194	36 3.5.1. The person leading from the middle must believe the appr	7	5.3
195	49 3.3. Maintain legitimizing	7	5.3
196	64 3.3.3.5. Seek out and use "bright spots" of best practices in other pl	7	5.3
197	79 4.2.1. Credit people with successes	7	5.3
198	10 3.2. Gain acknowledgement of problem	7	5.8
199	24 3.2.3. Be honest about knowledge of the problem	7	5.8
200	39 3.6. Seeker engaged sponsorship	7	5.8
201	48 3.8.1. Clear definitions of roles and responsibilities	7	5.8
202	64 4.1.1. Staff must be willing to make change in mental paradigm	7	5.8
203	48 3.6.1. Leadership must agree that there is a critical problem	7	5.8
204	49 3.6.2. Help senior leadership understand the problem	7	4.3
205	42 3.7. Allow and influence resources to be unengaged	7	5.7
206	32 3.3. Leadership must clearly communicate a staff that there is .	7	4.7
207	34 3.4.4. "Pink queer killer"	7	4.7
208	54 3.3.2. Integrate into existing workflows to allow for normal work	7	4.7
209	55 3.3.2.4. Moral legitimizing with superiors	5	4.7
210	2 1.1. Establish links with the strategy to identify and influence a	5	4.4
211	9 1.2. Engage relevant stakeholders (The business strategy)	5	4.4
212	8 2.1.2. Insist on integrity, honesty, and respect for all organization	5	4.4
213	28 3.2.2. Cultural Voice of the Customer from internal stakeholders	5	4.4
214	33 3.4.3. Phase implementation appropriately	5	4.4
215	63 4.1. Create learning opportunities and use a "learning approach	5	4.4
216	66 4.1.2. Empower groups to suggest solutions	5	4.4
217	76 4.2.4. Capability to use LHM approach to make progress in appra	5	4.4
218	38 3.5.3. Prepare for adversities	5	4.3
219	53 3.3.3.3. Control new and old approaches and adhere to successful	5	4.3
220	7 2.1.1. Minimize impact on existing resources allocations to avoid a	5	4.1
221	10 2.2.1. Outline briefs for personal growth and development	5	4.1
222	25 3.3.2. Pull fuel and adjust until it works	5	4.1
223	58 3.3.3.2. Show how this initiative takes work out of the system to ins	5	4.1
224	68 4.1.3.1. Include all the right people at the table	5	4.1
225	14 2.3. Communicate problem to different levels (Press and Suppor	5	3.3
226	16 3.1.1.1. Address systemic issues	5	3.3
227	34 3.4.1. Highlight needs and briefs	5	3.3
228	49 3.7.1. Establish a clear message - what is and what is not part of the	5	3.3
229	52 3.3.2.1. Consider new uses of available resources	5	3.3
230	53 3.3.2.2. Ensure effort aligns with mission critical values and prior	5	3.3
231	54 3.3.2.3. Conform to organization's core values and guidelines	5	3.3
232	67 4.1.3. Show accountability to organizational priorities and values	5	3.3
233	68 3.3.3.4. Develop and pilot trial solutions to problems and opportunities	5	3.7
234	17 3.1.1.1. Outline briefs for personal growth and development	5	3.6
235	74 4.2.2. Develop actionable new organizational capabilities	5	3.6
236	19 3.2.1. End customer must align all the Force/Fuel	5	3.4
237	38 3.4. Variable-time frame - "real, walk, run"	5	4.8



## 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)

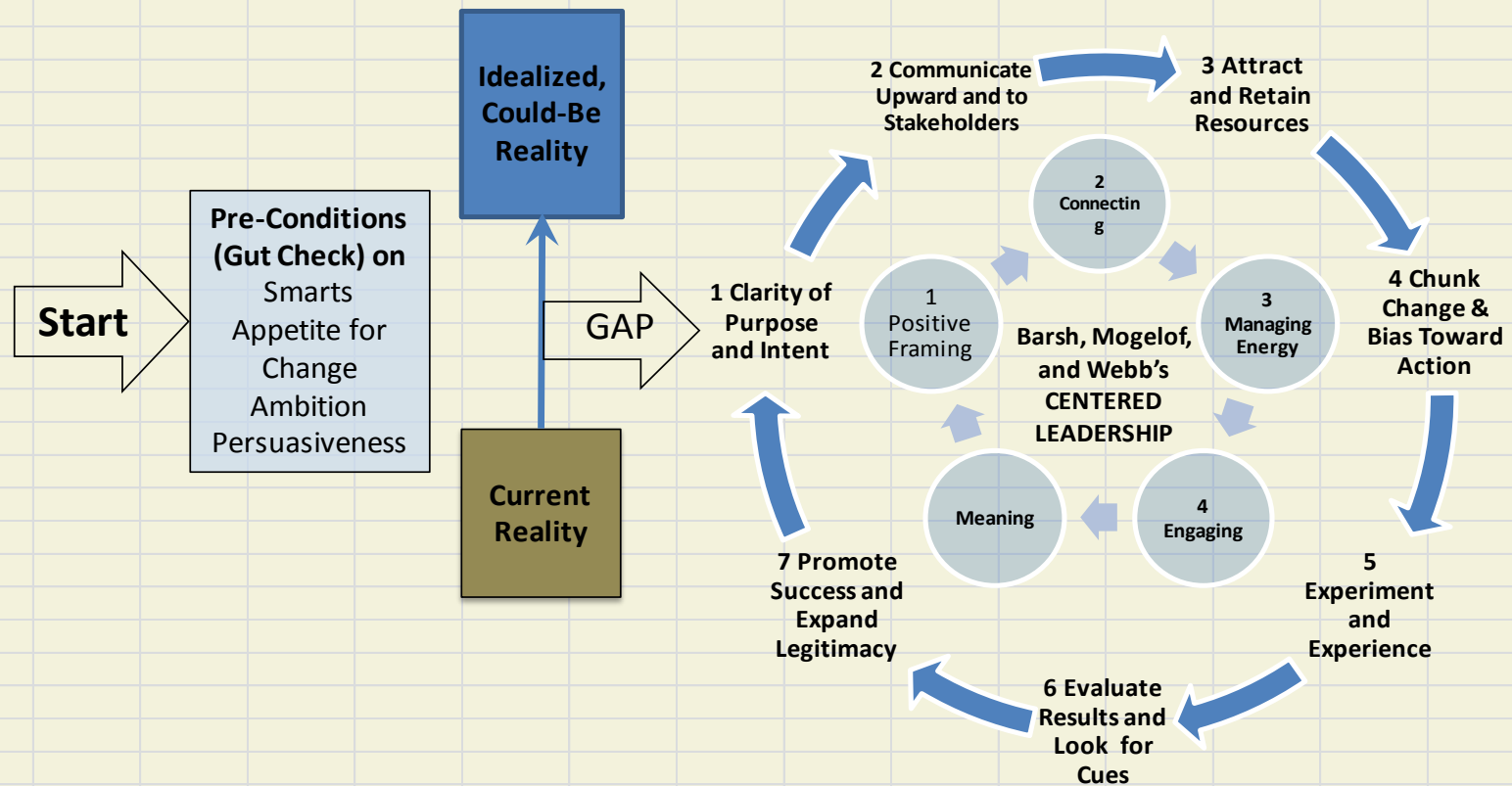
## Step 6 – Verify Idealized Design against vital few requirements in actual situations to generate “add and drop” ideas for revision

		Phase		
adds	provide vision - build a case for change among colleagues	1	drops	hold focus group or intent workshop in beginning - overkill
adds	ensure guiding principles being used for key decisions	1	drops	parking lot -- place where ideas go to die - by itself, not useful, culture of organization needs to be taken into account to determine value (will it ever be addressed)
adds	generate more individualized conversations	throughout	drops	drop mission statement - company/organization already has one, so more important to focus on purpose/intent vs a genericized "mission" (need to link TEAM mission back to organization MISSION,)
adds	train team members in process improvement, metrics, etc	3	drops	create clarity from complexity (if opportunity is not complex)
adds	consider bringing in outside expertise	3	drops	surveying for suggestions/recommendations may not be best feedback loop (post event is 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
adds	find people who have 'what you need' to make the LfTM possible - attract & influence new resources including people & subject matter/process experts (of that area)	3	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
adds	develop key metrics - balanced between various stakeholder groups - process areas have different key measures - develop common language?	1	drops	collection & publication of performance metrics (too many metrics, situation changes so much, measures out of date)
adds	motivate innovation to achieve results that offer clear competitive advantage, not just 'me too' Solutions, especially addressing conventional obstacles (focus 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
adds	small changes first to build legitimacy - fly under radar initially	4 or 7	drops	prototype portfolio may not be effective (too many activities drain resources) - use with care, or focus on biggest opportunity or one with highest probability of success
adds	bring into light hidden agendas of adversaries	throughout	drops	create understanding of potential outcome if we change now, vs delaying change to later (gut check up front vs. halfway through process)
adds	work with the team you have - find what motivates the individuals you have on team (or get rid of them...)	3 through	drops	use of "external" experts - people in organization may know more than consultants from outside
adds	add or focus on incentives for stakeholders	7 or 8	drops	ensure "keep them working" is valued added & supports team goals/objectives
adds	revisit parking lot periodically to see if deferred opportunities may help drive more engagement Or support process/change more than initially seen	throughout		
adds	id and define assumptions - actively seek any contradictions, bring to front for discussion	throughout		
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		
adds	communicate revised solution as needed to frame it as a positive learning experience	7		
adds	align roles, responsibilities, performance measures and jobs to support realization of goals (every task should align to a stated purpose/intent)	3		
adds	who has responsibility for feedback? Change agent, "changee?"	throughout		
adds	scope will evolve over time, indicators/measures have to be modified over time (test against stated purpose/intent)	6 or 7		
adds	Documentation of improved procedures, success stories, etc.	7 & 8		
adds	utilize existing/accepted performance metrics where possible	2		
adds	assess political landscape before you start	1		
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 evolve		

# The final design after third iteration

## LftM Simplified

Taking Responsibility without Authority for Actions That Will Make YOU The Leader YOU Have Been Looking for in an uncertain environment with high risk



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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.

# References

## Required Texts

- **Heath, Chip and Heath, Dan**, (2010) *SWITCH, How to Change Things When Change is Hard*, Broadway Book, Random House, New York, NY
- **Heath, Chip and Heath, Dan**, (2007, 2008), *MADE TO STICK, Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, Random House, New York, NY

## Required Articles

- **Ames, Daniel R., and Flynn, Francis J. (2007)** “What Breaks a Leader: The Curvilinear Relationship between Assertiveness and Leadership,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, American Psychology Association, Vol 92, No.2 pp. 307-324
- **Joanna Barsh, Josephine Mogelof and Caroline Webb**, “How Centered Leaders Achieve Extraordinary Results,” *McKinsey Quarterly*, 2010 No. 4 pages 78-88
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