CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Leaders of American organizations in the 1990s face dynamic and changing situations with complex problems that typically need immediate action. Helping leaders identify, prioritize, and solve such problems is fertile ground for action research: a change process based on systematic data collection, analysis, and action to solve organization problems (Cunningham, 1993).

This case study reports change actions resulting from a process consulting intervention to help leaders of a large federal agency solve their training problem. The resulting research reports findings about the consulting intervention and action learning in the process. What makes this research significant is 1) that it is reported, an uncommon characteristic of action research (Patton, 1990), and 2) that it is reflects feelings, thoughts, and experiences written in first person to emphasize process over structure. A naturalistic, holistic description of the research is provided for analysis now and in the future. This approach leads to insights about human dynamics within the organization, the consultant/researcher, and process consulting. Key to this action research is a readiness and willingness to change by all participants as such problem solving interventions lead to change, whether intended or not.

Background, Context, and Statement of the Problem

Problem identification begins at the headquarters of a large federal government organization facing major changes. As a result of a 1993 Congressional decision, the organization has to move from its two-centuries-old location in Washington, D.C., to Memphis, Tennessee. In the process of this move, the organization has to restructure, reduce its staff from 2200 to 1500 people, and become more efficient by integrating new technologies in critical areas such as computer and communications systems. Further complicating this move is the reality that few of the employees care to go. Personnel turnover in the organization is forecast as high as 70% or more in the first year of the move. Training was identified as a central issue and critical need in this “mess,” as Russell Ackoff calls such a system of problems (Ackoff, 1981).

The move, the downsizing, and the introduction of new technology in this “mess” collided with a surprising realization by senior leaders in 1996. That is, no one in the organization could provide an overview of their existing training. Worse, no one could fully address what training needed to be done, nor provide advice on the extent or priorities of training most needed to prepare for upcoming changes. Training was so fragmented that data and management systems could not support planning, tracking, or measurements of training. The organization's training problem became a driving concern: how to gather training data that could be used by senior leaders to make decisions about resourcing and realigning their training to support their transition.

To solve this problem, organization leaders talked with a colleague, now an independent consultant, who was familiar with the organization's culture; a former employee with a 26-year professional association in the organization. The outcome of their discussions was a contract to do a training study. The resulting strategic training needs assessment (TNA) and follow-on action research of the colleague/consultant/researcher's interventions are reported in this case study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the action research of this consulting intervention is to help federal agency leaders identify and solve their training problem. Interaction with senior leaders identifies differing views about the nature of the training problem and varying expectations of the intervention. Analysis is guided by research questions which focus on effects of the intervention in the organization, i.e., a training needs assessment to gather valid, useful training information from people within the organization helps senior leaders to make more informed decisions about their training problem(s). Support for solving the training problem becomes evident in varying degrees over time through allocation of resources such as time, people, money and space. Readiness of leaders to implement changes is assumed by their desire for immediate action to gather data.

Research Questions

The initial question in this case study was "How does a consultant intervene when invited to assess training?" The answer is revealed in action research of the process consulting intervention: doing a training needs assessment within the organization that will help leaders plan changes to improve training. Initial questions guiding the design of this action research became:

1. What actions and dynamics affect the training needs assessment and its subsequent use within the organization, i.e., how do the organization's senior leaders view and use it?

2. What happens when the consultant intervenes with the training needs assessment? How are short-term actions and long-range plans changed as a result of the intervention?

3. What are the organization dynamics that facilitate or inhibit the adoption of planned change?

As the research evolved, question one was refined to include the value of the training needs assessment to the organization's senior leaders. Answering question two was refocused to reflect a role change from consultant to researcher after the first action cycle. Additional questions that arose in the course of the research were:

- How to distinguish consultant/researcher role differences and minimize inherent bias in the process?
- How and when to conclude the research? and
- How to determine what may be the most significant information contributing to the organization's problem-solving, the consultant/researcher's learning, and the field of research?

The nature of these questions reflect dynamic changes from "*What* was requested of the consultant?" to "*What* is needed?", "*Why* is that important?" and "*How* to better intervene as a consultant/researcher now and in the future?".

The central characteristic of this action research is the cyclical process of diagnosing problems, collecting data, analysis, evaluation, feedback, and followup actions (Patton, 1990). From the organization's viewpoint, this action research process closely parallels the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle from the total quality management philosophy that the organization adopted in the late 1980s (Wiechert, 1993). Review of the literature explains how these PDCA cycle steps compare to definitions of action research. Both have as their central focus an ongoing concept of process improvement, which is often viewed as problem-solving (Brooks & Watkins, 1994,1; Deming, 1982; French, 1984,108-109; Patton, 1990,157; Robbins, 1996, 730-731).

Evolution of the research and refinement of the research question is described in three actions research cycles that begin with a 90-day consulting intervention, develops into research of the training needs assessment (TNA) delivered from the consulting, and ends with action learning cycle that goes beyond the actual action research. In measurable terms using the 80/20 Pareto Rule, action is 80% of the initial training needs assessment cycle and 20% is research. Cycle two, implementation, reverses the emphasis to 80% research and 20% action. The last cycle moves beyond action research into action learning with 100% focus on research and writing.

Answering the research questions was done through the consultant/researchers interventions over an 18-month period. The research questions guide assessments to track progress in solving the organization's problems. The research goes further to analyze the researcher in the process of consulting. Report of this action research deviates from more traditional reports by having six chapters instead of five. The additional chapter is the story of the action research as it evolves—a description of the actions, thoughts, emotions, and inferences occurring throughout the research.

Benefits and Significance of This Study

Looking at how a consultant/researcher intervenes to help an organization manage change fills a need in learning about what really goes on in the process. Answering the organization's questions with systematic, structured, and purposeful data provides immediate benefit to the organization's leaders. The data support more informed choices about allocating resources for training.

Another benefit to the organization is that some people develop ways to solve their own training problems rather than being told by outsiders. This learning helps lower resistance to change, a desired outcome from action research interventions (Kanter, 1983; Lewin, 1964; Lippitt, Watson & Westley, 1958).

Other benefits from this research are: collected information that identifies people and processes affecting the lives of others within the organization; helping people become aware of problems, understand their roles in the processes, and to develop commitment to correcting the problems; and serving as a catalyst to get people involved, organized, and active concerning particular issues within the organization (French & Bell, 1978; Schein, 1988; Watkins & Marsick, 1993).

The real benefit was the actual work in organizational and human resource development aimed at solving current, complex problems. This experience helped develop roles, attitudes, knowledge, skills, abilities and philosophy about organizational behavior and human dynamics. From an action learning perspective, this experience significantly enhanced the researcher's understanding about action research, the change process, and the evolutionary nature of organizations and human dynamics.

A final benefit of this research is the contribution of a case study to the field of behavioral science, providing a broader and more integrated understanding of action research. Traditional theories were rigorously reviewed, applied, and evaluated. The results from this research provide a broader perspective of alternate ways to both conduct research and improve consulting practices. This case study provides descriptive, inductive documentation that helps a large federal government organization plan and implement changes to their training. It provides insight on process interventions for future actions not only for this organization, but as a case study for other consultants.

Limitations of the Study

Time was the first critical condition limiting the study. The organization's leaders wanted a quality training needs report within 90 days of the initial contract meeting. They had limited financial resources to invest in this unbudgeted TNA intervention, so most of the resources had to come from within the organization. That meant this intervention had to compete for people (who were already very busy due to personnel turnover and organizational downsizing), money (which was intended for other uses), and time (to gather meaningful data to the extent available). Balancing the triad of time, money, and people to deliver a quality TNA was a significant challenge—the first measure of effectiveness in this action research.

Organization dynamics of power, influence, communication, and access were also significant limitations to the study. The researcher, even in a consulting role, lacked internal and external control over the process, requiring heavy reliance on the powers and influence of organization members. The organization's dynamics shaped the intervention. The lack of control added emphasis to the need for a natural, holistic nature of the problem-solving process. This limitation increased the need for using multiple methods to measure, cross-check, and validate data and findings.

Another limitation was confidentiality required by the potentially sensitive nature of data and findings. The researcher and organization leaders agreed that research findings would be anonymous and unconnected to any predetermined decisions within the organization.

Despite these limitations, this action research aimed at being problem-centered, not "solution-centered" in keeping with the principles of quality research (Robbins, 1996, 731).

Findings

This case study reports the action and significant findings of the research. Understand that the most significant finding of action research is the action. What is revealed in writing about this research of the action are the human dynamics that then influence changes to the structure and content of organization. Action described and analyzed in this research are findings relevant at this writing. They reflect the changes in the consultant/researcher through the intervention process as well as changes resulting from the intervention.

The ultimate finding is that action research is a counter-intuitive, complex, dynamic, fluid, change process heavily influenced by roles, relationships, and interactions of individuals within organizations. Models diagraming this complexity are reflected in the following chapters. These models draw from the wisdom of theorists from multiple fields as evident in chapter two, review of the literature. They integrate methods from these different fields as evident in chapter III, Methodology. They lead us through a first person description of the research in chapter IV. They frame analysis of the findings and results in chapter IV. And they ground the action learning summarized in chapter VI. The models are also capsulized in appendices for ease of reference.

Remember this writing reflects the relevance and meaning of the research at this time. As with all things it will be subject to review and deeper reflection. May you find value in this reading.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of the Literature Review

Action research is a useful model for enhancing organizational change. An overview of what has been written about action research, the change process, and analysis of training needs assessments will frame and bound this case study: an in-depth analysis of one setting (Merriam, 1988, and Merriam & Simpson, 1995). Terms, concepts, models, and theories relevant to this research will follow with a summary of what is most useful to guide the process of helping the organization solve their training problem(s).

Because action research case study involves a continuous process of action learning (Revans, 1982), this literature review represents fundamental knowledge available at the beginning of the research. This knowledge was used to frame the problem(s) and guide the research process (Merriam & Simpson, 1989, 109). Subsequent learning is reflected in later chapters as the research evolves.

Insight to the literature is presented like a road map routing through major areas of knowledge such as action research, then goes more in depth to look at specific phenomenon suggested by leading researchers in particular fields such as process consulting and training needs assessments. This approach allows an overview of the complexity, reality and a wide range of theories integrated to assess and adapt solutions suited to meet the organization's needs. As noted action researcher Cunningham forecasts, "it is highly unlikely that the researcher can know definitely and in advance the exact theory that will be used or developed. The definition of the problem, the propositions to be tested, and the methods to be employed undergo modification as interim results are validated or invalidated in practice" (Cunningham, 1993, 61).

Key criteria in reviewing the references were their relevance to this situation, their utility in explaining concepts, their clarity of understanding, and most important, their currency and availability (Cunningham, 1993; Watkins & Brook, 1994). The search started with what was easily available to help frame the problem in ways easily understood by the researcher and clients to help answer questions and to identify the extent of the training problem(s). Ironically, continuous literature review throughout the research leads to the realization that trying to define and solve “the problem” the way action research has typically been conducted may become part of the problem; that systems improvement may be a more effective approach than traditional problem-solving (Deming, 1982, and Weisbord, 1987, 251).

Definition of Terms and Concepts (Also at Glossary, Appendix A)

Action Research

Action research is a form of qualitative inquiry emerging from the field of research as a more natural and holistic way of improving organizational systems. Having gained acceptability as the basis for organization development, action research expands conventional research methods to include the development of new skills and approaches to solving problems (French & Bell, 1984; Isaac & Michael, 1981; Schein, 1992; and Rothwell, Sullivan & McLean, 1995).

J. Cunningham, a current action researcher, explains action research as “a spectrum of activities that focus on research, planning, theorizing, learning and development” (1993, 63). He adds that the process generally involves “assessing, focusing, and implementing” (Cunningham, 1993, 68). Continuous research and learning occur in the researcher’s long-term relationship with the problem (Cunningham, 1993, 4). Alex McEachern says it is a way to find out what is going on in an organization in order to do something to improve it (McEachern, 1993, xi). Other action technology researchers start with the *purpose* of action research: “...to solve problems in a program, organization, or community” (Patton, 1990, 161); and is “...aimed at organizational change” (Watkins & Marsick, 1993, 120). These varied approaches and definitions have in common a useful problem solving methodology for planning activities to help organizations change.

Since action research is a problem-solving process, one might assume action research is a common, synonymous term. Surprisingly, the initial literature review revealed that the term “action research” has not been commonly used. Familiar theorists and researchers names, such as Dewey, Lewin, Argyris, Jacques, and French surface in literature reviews only indirectly connected to action research. Descriptions of what could be related to action research has been more commonly called organization development, quality management, and learning organizations. Why these problem solving approaches were not described as action research became a part of this researcher's action learning.

Historical research revealed indirect references to action research as the foundation for more recent operationally oriented interventions such as Organization Development (OD), Total Quality Management (TQM), and recent learning organization initiatives. An intuitive thinker might assume OD and TQM interventions are action research. This researcher made no such assumption and analyzed specific cases to discern their similarity. Analyzing these popular interventions found action research references at their roots. The fact that few current authors describe their works as action research may be because their writing is edited to fit current terminology and leaves out reference to more systematic and rigorous parts of the research. Popular writing about OD, TQM, and, now, learning organizations, for example, is generally represented as short case studies, stories, and anecdotes of limited actions with minimal reference to underlying research. The rigorous long-term action research Cunningham describes as being needed, is hard to find. Intuitively obvious to some, this realization was like finally seeing the forest (action research) after identifying popular trees (TQM and OD cases studies). Action research came to be understood not only as a forest, but an old growth forest embodying the theories of noted individuals from many fields. Background on where significant theories and principles (trees) grew up to form the practice of action research (the "forest") helps put action research into perspective.

Evolution of Action Research

Educator John Dewey planted the first seeds of action research in his translation of the classical scientific method of problem-solving into usable terms during the 1930s (French, 1984, 113). His ideas were expanded during the mid-1940s and early 1950s by social psychologist Kurt Lewin and associates building theories in several different behavioral domains (French, 1989, 114 and Lewin, 1947, 5). Their work and that of others was supported through research programs at the Center for Group Dynamics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London, and the National Training Laboratory in Bethel, Maine (Cunningham, 1993).

Examples of early applied research principles evolving from these programs are leadership training (Bavelas, 1954), resistance to change (Coch & French, 1948), cultural changes in an

English factory (Jacques, 1952), experiments investigating leadership styles (Morse & Reimer, 1956), and planned change (Shepard & Katzell, 1960). These ideas were intended to help solve social problems in organizations. They were parts of what came to be called action research (French & Bell, 1984). Ironically, the different action related research efforts flowed into current practices with no pure form, uniform principles, or standardized procedures (Cunningham, 1993).

Since these early efforts, action research has had limited written review in the United States. More recent and extensive writing about action research come from outside the United States (Brooks & Watkins, 1994; Cunningham, 1993). Organization development and learning organization literature which contains reference to action research have been predominant in the U.S. Therein is a paradoxical revelation about action research; it is barely discernible because it is not always reported as action research.

J. Barton Cunningham suggests a reason action research has been unreported is that its “tools and techniques were viewed as inadequate by traditional scientists.” (Cunningham, 1993, 3). The perceived lower status of action research in academic circles—due in part to debates over what is rigorous, viable research—may have made it less accessible in published form. For example, pressure from positivists in the field of education argued that research was no place for amateurs—teachers do not have time for research—that it would detract from teaching (Brooks & Watkins, 1994, 9). Practitioners in management appear to have avoided the argument be calling action research organization development. This perceived inadequacy may also help explain a lack of standard definitions and principles for action research.

Another reason goes unreported is that action research often addresses sensitive issues and corporate practices individuals and organizations prefer not to share. Discussion with colleagues working in major consulting firms such as Anderson Consulting, Booze, Allen, & Hamilton, and Coopers & Lybrand identified action research work being done under contract, that is not likely to be made public. Potential sensitivities in this case led to an agreement of anonymity when the report is published.

A final issue on reporting action research is that it “leads to systematic change or it aborts.” (Watkins & Brooks, 1993, 122). More action research may have aborted than reached publication.

Very little action research has been found on strategic needs assessment, the particular approach chosen for this research. In fact, few case studies were found that incorporated action research approaches with multi-level, multi-method, strategies such as those suggested by Holton (1995, 11), McClelland (1995, 31) and Witkin & Altschuld (1995, 281). We may find more strategic action research cases in the future as short articles, limited cases stories, and anecdotes of limited actions draw demand for more holistic reports. Meantime, the unwritten implication is that it may be easier to conceptualize strategic needs assessments and perhaps even do them, than it is to report them. Kaufman & English (1979) particularly note that not all needs assessors are afforded time, money, and other resources required to conduct broader assessments.

As Patton, Cunningham, Brooks and Watkins suggest, research objectives have to be weighed with resource realities. The end result appears to be that the type of research most needed, seems to be least practiced, or at least reported. Such was an issue for the researcher and the organization. Nurturing this research through three cycles over 18 months required considerable perseverance and personal resourcing.

Action Research Methodology

Whether in the field of education or management, Patton's perspective is that "too much research, evaluation, and policy analysis is based on habit rather than situational responsiveness and attention to methodological appropriateness" (Patton, 1990, 38). Such habits appear to limit definitions, tools, and techniques used in action research. His solution is to *increase* the options available to researchers and evaluators rather than debate or argue which is better (Patton, 1990, 39). Such is the philosophy and approach of this researcher: pragmatism, not debate. Take useful theories and practices from many fields, apply them to help solve the organizations problems, and see how things work.

Brooks & Watkins suggest that scientific categories from "methodological orthodoxy" are in fact arbitrary with biased observations (Brooks & Watkins, 1994, 8). They see action technologies (like action research) as "the next logical step beyond the naive realism of natural social science." (Brooks & Watkins, 1994, 8). Their recommendation is to "move researchers from the role of objective observers into a collaborative relationship with research subjects—and establish a dynamic and ongoing inquiry into the particular." (Brooks & Watkins, 1994, 8).

The movement of more recent researchers appears, as previously mentioned, under the guise of organization development which has action research as its foundation (Cunningham, 1993, 262; French & Bell, 1964, 119). The learning organization's movement seems to have a similar foundation of action research. Both OD and learning organization approaches are respected in their fields, are best-sellers in the market place, and appear to be helping leaders solve their organization problems. Accordingly, elements from these approaches are integrated into this researcher's consulting intervention. This approach, however, contributes to what Weisbord calls "mental model muddle" (Weisbord, 1987, 279). Using models from different fields involves considerable "cognitive complexity" (Jacques, 1952, 1988, 1992, 1994) to frame and explain the experience. Adapting theorists' models to frame and explain the action and research is a continuous learning process. More is written on that problem in the methods and analysis chapters.

The small amount of literature actually cited as action research is both good and bad news: good news because this research adds to the body of literature on strategic, holistic training needs assessments; bad news if it fails to help the client solve their problems and becomes shelved as just another study. Writing the story to explain the process in a meaningful way is a challenge because the situation is so dynamic, complex, and has different audiences: i.e., the client organization is different from those reading this research. The action focuses on helping individuals in the organization but the researcher's focus is on learning through the process consulting intervention. The need for more holistic, naturalistic action research is clearly apparent to improve strategic change processes.

Change Processes

The change process is critical in action research because change is generally the intended *action* of the research. The focus on *process* emphasizes *how* things change as well as *structure*, which focuses on *what* changes (Schein, 1987, 39). The rate and frequency of change have been accelerating as evident in our life experiences (Toffler, 1980, 1990; Savage, 1996, 267). Accompanying the acceleration are improved measures of change, particularly evident in organizations consciously seeking to improve their effectiveness (Kanter, Stein, & Jick, 1992).

Evaluating different change models helps us gain more insight to organizations by looking beyond traditional structures to identify forces driving and restraining change from inside and outside the organization. This insight helps avoid the tendency of making this organization's change seem simpler than it really is: a delicate balance dependent upon the levels and need for cognitive complexity by the researcher and the organization leaders—some just want basics, some want only the big picture or bottom line, while others require more detail to make things work. With these varying wants and needs for scoping the complexity of organizational changes it is no wonder that "organizations change as little as they must, rather than as much as they should" (Kanter, Stein, & Jick, 1992, 4). The human tendency is to "freeze up" when things get too complex or are insufficiently detailed to do, especially in hierarchical organizations as this case reveals.

Major Change Models

The traditional model of organization change is generally simplified into movement among three states: unfreezing, movement, and refreezing (Lewin, 1947). Kurt Lewin's terms from his systematic study of planned change (as it came to be known in the mid-1940s) have been widely modeled, paraphrased and expanded over the past 50 years (Kanter, Stein, & Jick, 1992). Models similar to Lewin's in order of their evolution are: Walter Shewart's (1939) Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) problem-solving model popularized by W. Edwards Deming (1982) and others associated with the Total Quality movement of the 1980s; Beckhard & Harris' (1977) Present State, Transition State, Future State; Tichy & DeVanna's (1986) three acts of Awakening, Mobilizing, and Reinforcing; and Nadler & Tushman's (1989) Energizing, Envisioning, and Enabling. For more detail, a matrix comparing these key change models and less known models that have been published over the past century, is provided in appendix B.

Differing in measures, these change models appear to relate generally to the traditional scientific tripartite conceptualization: before something changes, change something, then look for the change effects. Researchers increasingly find such simplifications useful for framing problems but inadequate for fully understanding what really goes on in the organizational change process (Ackerman, 1984; Cunningham, 1993; Kanter, 1983).

The most recent and comprehensive change model is Kanter's "Big Three" model of change which has evolved as an action-oriented model. Kanter's model focuses "on three interconnected aspects of organizations: the forces, both external and internal, that set events in motion; the major kinds of change that correspond to each of the external and internal change pressures; and the principal tasks involved in managing the change process." (Kanter, Stein & Jick, 1992, 14-15). The "Big Three" model helps capture the complexity of change in organizations as a continuous flow of three *motions*—environment, life cycle, and revolutionary/ power and political forces—with three *forms*—identity/relationships, coordination, and control), in three *roles* (change strategists, change implementers, and change recipients.

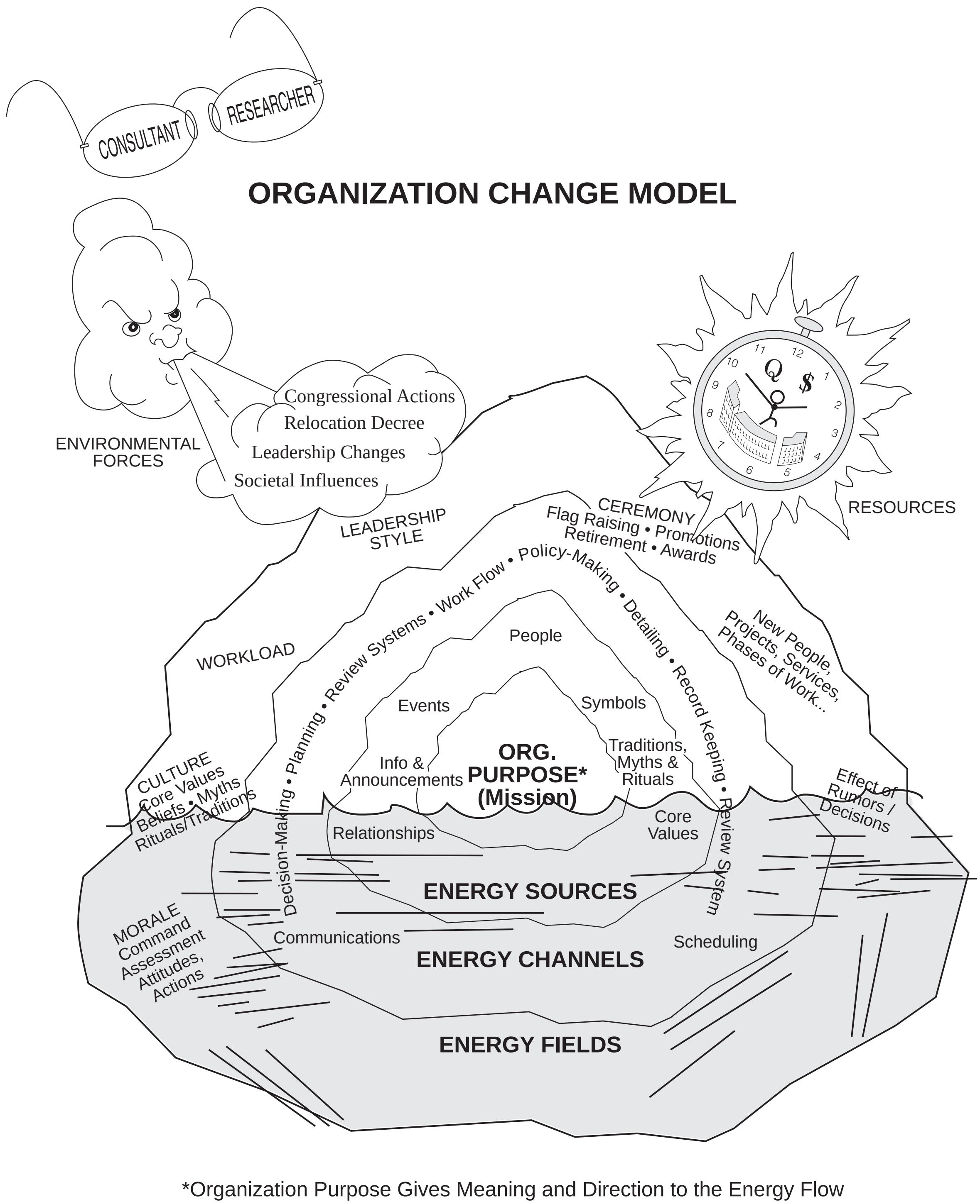
One particularly important element that Kanter's "Big Three" change model alludes to is the shift toward viewing organizations dynamically. Linda Ackerman (1984) relates these dynamics to energy in her writing about organizational transformations in the mid-1980s. She conceptualizes change dynamics in energy flow as a way to get beyond traditionally viewing organizations as tangible parts focused mainly on results, decisions, and structures. Ackerman captures the dynamics of energy in the term "flow state management" where forces are cyclical in nature. Her model describes *sources* of energy, *channels* of energy, and energy *fields* (Ackerman, 1984, 122).

An empirical view of change requires definition of an organization's operational characteristics. Kanter, Stein & Jick (1992) suggest these characteristics are patterns of behavior of both organizations and the people in them, i.e., the composition of "an organization". Edgar Schein helps us understand that "Organizations in the end are nothing more than networks of human *relationships* [researcher's emphasis]. If these networks do not function effectively there is nothing with which to perform the tasks to be accomplished".

<u>Researcher's Organization Change Model</u>

Figure 2.1 is this researcher's conceptual integration of Kanter's "Big Three" change model with Ackerman's "Energy Flow State". Viewed from a distance (i.e., the consultant/ researcher view from the upper left hand corner), the iceberg represents the hierarchical nature of this organization with the essence of Lewin's change concept . The tip of the iceberg reveals the dynamics when change is evident (above the water line) and when it is undetectable, taken for granted, or undiscussible (below the water line). Starting from the center, the organization's purpose harnesses energy *sources* flowing through a myriad of *channels* affecting large *fields*

of energy characteristic in the organization. The cyclical nature of the change actions Ackerman refers to are represented in later models and description of this action research.



Adaptation of Ackerman, Linda S. (1984). The flow state: A new view of organizations and managing. In Adams, J.D. (Ed). *Transforming work: A collection of organization transformation readings.* Alexandria, VA: Miles River Press, p. 114-137.

Figure 2.1. Organization Change Model

Capturing the complexity of change in this action research requires identifying the organization's key training characteristics, culture, and concerns. These elements are relevant parts of various change models captured to represent this organization. This iceberg shape represents the hierarchical structure with key characteristics of energy sources, channeling through the system fields. Individuals can relate their energy investments in terms of their job, their group, or the organization as a whole to make the model meaningful. For example, the consulting intervention started by focusing at the center of the model to verify the organization's purpose/mission as the focal point for the training needs assessment. Next came teambuilding to harness and channel energy to gather data on how others invested energy (time, money, people) in training. That data helped identify major types of training being channeled through the organization such as orientation training and job training. How this training reinforced the culture, affected workloads, and influenced morale were dynamics relevant to the training needs assessment.

While the consulting actions radiate from the center outward, the research perspective view from a bird's eye position (see glasses in the upper left hand corner) scanned for external forces (winds of change) and internal resources (radiance of time, people, money, facilities) influencing the size, shape, and drift of the organization iceberg.

Networks and patterns of behavior around the TNA are documented in chapter IV, and analyzed in chapter V for insight into characteristics of the organization's structure, systems and culture. Documenting the organizations characteristics helps to understand how to modify it, hence, effect the training change. This understanding about the change process is critical to get beyond one common misperception about change: that it can be "ordered". Numerous cases abound of "ordered change" with unchanged, or worse, unintended consequences (Kanter, Stein & Jick, 1992). Given the authoritative structure of this organization, "ordered change" was a predictable finding in this action research. What became fascinating and frustrating was the research process to identify changes, unintended and intended, and draw inferences from the actions taken relative to training . Those findings and the process of their discovery are unique characteristics in writing about this action research.

Consulting and Interventions

Brooks, Watkins, and Patton’s pragmatic position of avoiding research debates helped in designing an open, flexible action research methodology framed as a consulting intervention: to enter as a process consultant—a change agent involved in organization development to work on specific problems with top and middle managers (Lippitt & Lippitt, 1978; Schein, 1979, 1987, 1988).

The *intervention*, as Argyris defines it, is any specific, planned activity that “interferes” with a sequence of events; “to enter into an ongoing system of relationships, to come between or among persons, groups, or objects for the purpose of helping them” (Argyris, 1970, 15). As Edgar Schein explains, “every part of the process consultant—even the act of deciding to work with the organization constitutes an Intervention” (Schein, 1988, 142).

The primary intervention in this case is problem diagnosis with direct observation of the process being studied (Schein, 1988, 142), i.e., the training needs assessment. This diagnosis helps identify problems and changes in perceptions and attitudes that affect actions, inaction, and reactions that generate new ideas in peoples minds.

The consulting frame of reference includes: “…all that one believes or knows to be true of the worlds; the sorts of things that are in it, both animate and inanimate, and how they behave; what has happened in the past; and what is likely to happen in the future.” (Moore, et al, 1985, 10) This frame of reference includes potential limitations of perception, knowledge, experience and ability to accurately process and report the research. Hence, the need for continuous action learning—a process of challenging assumptions (Revans, 1982). Learning to view through consulting and researcher lenses from a distance and close up, even three-dimensional to see beyond the obvious is a frame of reference for continual learning.

The consulting frame of reference established a proactive action research approach developing a collaborative relationship with former colleagues to help them assess their training needs. Ensuing intervention work involves: “a) generating valid information; b) presenting the data to organization members to serve as a basis for informed decisions; and c) helping to develop commitment to any decisions that are made” (Argyris, 1978). In this case, the TNA is the information presented and used to help leaders make decisions to improve training. How to generate and evaluate valid information about the organization’s training requires review of the literature on training needs assessments—the organization's requested intervention.

Training Needs Assessment

What did the organization leaders mean when they asked for a training needs assessment? They suggested something like the following definition, leaving particulars to the consultant:

> 1. Identifies and explores performance gaps at three levels: organizational, occupational (job) and individual...;
>
> 2. The process of identifying performance requirements within an agency and the "gap" between what performance is required and what presently exists (Office of Personnel Management Needs Assessment Handbook, 1994, 15).

This definition of training needs assessment from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Training Needs Assessment Handbook is a distillation of current theories by an expert group of government-wide human resource development specialists. The OPM Training Needs Assessment handbook provides a useful process to assess this government organization's training needs. Interestingly, the handbook is a 1990s product of federal government re-engineering efforts. But it had not trickled down through the federal system to users at this organization's level. Having located it in the literature review, and in the interest of time, it served as an authoritative reference to guide the first phase of the action research.

Definition of terms was particularly important to members of this organization involved in the training improvement actions. For example, clarification was needed of the initial request to "conduct a training needs assessment survey and perhaps focus groups" (Martineau, February 1996). The words in that request suggest four possible actions, none of which fully addressed the senior leaders' expressed concerns. The value of a multi-method, multi-level needs assessment, in addition to a survey, became evident from initial discussions and was, therefore, proposed to the organization's senior leaders.

To clarify what the leaders needed and to build a common understanding of terms, the agencies own references were researched and cited. The intent was to use familiar terms and definitions rather than use higher level academic, or theoretical language and perspectives. The latter could be distracting and confusing.

Interestingly, definition of the main terms “training”, “needs assessment”, and training needs assessment were absent in the organization’s references. That the terms are often used, but not defined in the organization explains why senior leaders held differing views and expectations of the training needs assessment.

Research at the highest federal level finally found a definition of “training” in Title 5 of the United States Code, section 4101:

> Any training that improves individual and organizational performance and assists an agency in achieving its mission and performance goals...and includes planned activities which support and improve individual and organizational performance and effectiveness, such as on-the-job training, career development programs, professional development activities, or developmental assignments (5 U.S.C. 4101 as amended in 1994).

This definition is a broader framework of training than the individual leaders envisioned. Their primary focus was on-the-job training. But the Title 5. U.S.C. 4101 training definition encompassed more types and levels of training within the organization that needed to be assessed.

Definition of “training needs assessment” was found in the recently written Office of Personnel Management handbook (HRDG-024). This description further explains training needs assessment as:

> The process of identifying performance requirements within an agency and the “gap” between what performance is required and what presently exists. When a difference exists, a needs assessment explores the causes and reasons for the gaps and methods for closing or eliminating the gap. A complete needs assessment also considers the consequences for ignoring the gaps. (OPM, 1994, 15).

This definition fits with Kaufman’s perspective and problem-solving approach distilled in his article “Needs Assessment Primer” (Kaufman, 1990, 224). Kaufman’s primer also provides an input-process-output model of the training needs assessment process along with other tools like those the organization has been adopting as part of their Total Quality Leadership (TQL) philosophy. Kaufman’s primer is a useful supplemental reference to the OPM Needs Assessment Handbook for team members.

Witkin & Altschuld further expand the training needs assessment definition to include "a systematic set of procedures undertaken for the purpose of setting priorities and making decisions about program or organizational improvement and allocation of resources. The priorities are based on identified needs." (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995, 4).

Some needs were described at the individual level, such as advancement examination proficiency, some at the job level such as computer literacy competence, and some at the organization level such as orientation to the organization's mission. Prioritizing these needs into a viable action plan became part of the training needs assessment.

This overview and expanded combination of definitions grounds the action research methodology and provides a general framework for a plan designed to address the organization's initial questions and perceived needs. To put these training needs assessment definitions in context, a quick trip through its evolution, i.e., through waves of change, is useful.

Evolution of Training Needs Assessments

Needs assessments trace back to the era of the industrial revolution when Frederick Taylor's scientific management theory (1911) led to the development of ways to help identify industry training needs. By the 1940s ways to assess training were used through an advisory service known as Training Within Industry (TWI). This significantly supported national defense needs during World War II to develop a system for assessing and training replacement workers entering defense-related industries (McClelland, 1995, 6).

Interestingly, this work in training needs assessments occurred about the same time that action research was being done at Tavistock, MIT, and eventually the National Training Laboratory. Synergy of ideas from these parallel efforts, though not evident in the literature, was very likely through interaction of the organization's leading researchers.

From the mid-1940s into the 1960s, needs assessments in management began to be integrated with behavioral sciences. This integration became evident in the writing of the following classic researchers: Kurt Lewin (1947) who contributed the model of change; Chris Argyris (1957) who identified the inherent conflict between needs of organizations and the personality of adults; Lippitt, Watson, and Westley (1958) who theorized the dynamics of planned change; Douglas McGregor (1960) whose Theory X and Theory Y articulated basic assumptions on organizational behavior; Rensis Likert (1961) who provided empirically based data on participatory management and organization development techniques, and Victor Vroom (1964) and Frederick Herzberg (1966) who contributed research on work and motivation. Their works helped bridge gaps between theory and application.

The wave of human changes described by the Tofflers (1990) as “The Third Wave,” begins in the mid-1950s and shifts focus onto assessments of personal growth and professional development. During the 1960s needs assessment research shared by Roger Kaufman and McGehee & Thayer (1961) gave us the now generally used levels of assessment evident in the opening OPM definition: organizational, occupational/operational, and individual (McClelland, 1995, 6 and Witkin & Altschuld, 1995, xix).

Into the present Information Age, a fourth wave (Czerwinski, 1996), have come more complex technical and sophisticated needs assessment tools for determining problems in organizations (Holton, 1995, 3). The term tools is used here to represent ways to solve problems—both the classic theory tools and tools based on newer concepts, such as systems thinking and theories evolving out of learning organization literature (Senge, Reimer, Ross and Smith, 1994, 31). Continued research and writing by Kaufman & English (1979, 31) and Mager & Pipe (1984) provide us more specific models and tools being developed and used in actual training needs assessment cases.

The fifth wave (Savage, 1996) crests in the 1990s with new research on needs assessment by Catherine Sleezer (1991, 1992 & 1995) which integrates the earlier writing and builds on the 1980s work of Goldstein (1986), Rossett (1987), and Laird (1985). Sleezer and Swanson (1994) have helped introduce multiple methods of needs assessments to provide a more strategic way of assessing an organization’s systems and needs (Holton, 1995, 11). The OPM training needs assessment model is this kind of strategic, multiple method approach which helps relate the complexities of change that Ackerman, Kanter and others identify in their models. Multiple methods also support the type of action research Cunningham, Patton, Watkins & Marsick, and others suggest is needed.

Sleezer’s 1992 post-dissertation article on needs assessment is a useful supplement to the OPM reference as she defines related terms of needs analysis, front end analysis, and performance analysis, terms need which needed clarification when they surfaced in the organization (Sleezer, 1992, 34-46). Her article also identifies how different viewpoints affect where needs assessments should start and stop, and why they generate different results. This insight is very helpful in dealing with the complexities of the training needs assessment process which several of the organizations leaders simplify as linear, logical, and sequential when it is quite the opposite. Sorting out where individual leaders' thoughts about processes are coming from and leading to is important in analyzing data from within the organization, particularly when differing viewpoints and expectations were encountered. This insight is also important in negotiating start and stop points. Findings about bounding the intervention with a stopping point is described and analyzed in future chapters.

Other American authors who have written on needs assessments include Elwood Holton (1995), Samuel McClelland (1995), Jack Phillip (1995), Fernando Soriano (1995), and Belle Ruth Witkin & James Altschuld (1995). Their writings are action oriented and build on the work of earlier leaders in education, management, and the behavioral science. As this research evolved, their ideas, insights, and findings are discussed relative to their use in understanding the change process.

Knowledge of these principles and theories are foundation planks of this researcher's research approach. They help guide the eventual research actions. Each one adds understanding about human dynamics in the problem-solving process as well as linking theories across fields and over time from the industrial revolution to the current information era. Into this era also comes a final concept called the learning organization. It is a conceptual stretch for this organization and research but is included as a way to help the organization's transition and future transformation.

Learning Organizations

Peter Senge defines a learning organization as "An organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future." (Senge, 1990, 14). This definition starts our literature review on learning organizations and systems thinking. It helps frame a holistic perspective of this case study and draws extensively from the work of Peter Senge, leader of the Center for Organization Learning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and his colleagues Daniel Kim, Charlotte Roberts, Richard Ross and Bryan Smith (1994). Their research started in the 1990s with over 30 major corporations developing as learning organizations. Their effects are just beginning to be understood and applied within the Center's consortium and the newly formed society for Organizational Learning (The Systems

Thinker, June/July 1997). Most useful from their work is Daniel Kim's systemic quality management model that integrates the Plan-Do-Check-Act change model, similar to what this organization has been adopting, with a traditional organizations model of system dynamic organizational intervention (Kim, 1990, 6). Kim's integrated model is explained in the methods chapter as a generic way to understand and analyze the action that becomes evident in this action research. His combination of known classic models in a planned change action framework also represents different types of learning found through the consulting process. Results of the learning become evident in description and analysis of ensuing action cycles in chapters IV and V.

Finally, what makes this action research a case study? This case studies one setting as a way to develop a better understanding of process consulting (Merriam, 1987, 31). This approach aims to convey a dynamic and holistic analysis of the process consulting intervention in keeping with case study design suggested by Merriam & Simpson (1995) and Kenny & Groteluesche (1988).

Summary Assessment of the Literature

This overview and combination of definitions grounds the action research methodology and provides a general framework for designing a plan to address the organization's initial questions and perceived needs. For easy reference these definitions and other terms used throughout the literature review are provided in a glossary at appendix A.

There is an abundance of writing on change and needs assessment to support this research. Also evident is a growing need, understanding, and theoretical base for conducting more comprehensive action research efforts. The increase in recent publications also helps explain and support the value of preparing evaluators (such as this consultant/researcher) to conduct more systematic strategic or system-thinking needs assessments. This need to better prepare evaluators has been addressed by a national study of the preparation of professional evaluators (Altschuld, Engle, Cullen, Kim, and Macce, 1994). The need for preparing needs assessment evaluators became even more clear during the literature review when most of the cases reviewed were found to describe narrowly focused problems like determining job skill training using traditional methods such as surveys. The limited literature involving systematic, strategic perspectives supports the need for more naturalistic, holistic case studies of this type.

This initial literature review on action research, change, and training needs assessments, concludes by returning to reflections on the change process—what will lead to systematic change within this organization and *not* abort in the process or be put on some shelf to gather dust. Understanding the more complex nature of change suggested by Ackerman (1984) and Kanter, Stein & Jick's (1992) and others helped generate the integrated iceberg change model identifying organization characteristics working as driving and restraining forces in the organization. Multiple methods now prioritize and focus on the most critical processes the organization leaders choose for action and research. How this is done is explained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

> There is no rule of thumb that tells a researcher precisely how to focus a study. The extent to which a research question is broad or narrow depends on purpose, the resources available, the time available, and the interests of those involved. In brief, these are not choices between good and bad, but choices among alternatives, all of which have merit. (Patton, 1990, 6)

Framework and Assumptions

These words about research begin the methodological design—to remind us of realities and the opportunities in this case study. The breadth of research questions and limited resources, for example, require a strategic framework that allows multiple methods and flexibility.

The frame of reference used to answer the research questions was the researcher's systematic observation, interpretation, and action (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Moore, et al, 1985, Schein, 1988). This multi-lensed framework acknowledges the impossibility of observing everything. Therefore, the level, direction and duration of focus were set near to the top of the organization where the major action occurs. This frame of reference also includes potential limitations for perceiving gaps in knowledge, experiences, ability to provide information, and accurately report what has been experienced. Moore and others explain that "frames of reference include all that one believes or knows to be true" (Moore, et al, 1985, 10).

Simple frames of reference include time, both chronological and zeitgeist (spirit of the time), a consulting code of conduct essentially to do no harm, and a professional design approach to allow for integration of multiple frames to characterize this research. A multi-frame approach suggested by Bolman & Deal (1991, 48) requires several structural assumptions:

• Organizations exist primarily to accomplish established goals (purpose/mission).

• For any organization, a structural form can be designed and implemented to fit its particular set of circumstances (such as goals, strategies, environment, technology, and people).

• Organizations work most effectively when environmental turbulence and personal preferences are constrained by norms of rationality, i.e., structure ensures that people focus on getting the job done rather than on doing whatever they please.

• Specialization permits higher levels of individual expertise and performance.

• Coordination and control are essential to effectiveness. Depending on the task and environment, coordination may be achieved through authority, rules, policies, standard operating procedures, information, systems, meetings, lateral relationship, or a variety of more informal techniques.

• Organizational problems originate from inappropriate structures or inadequate systems and can be resolved through restructuring or developing new systems (Bolman & Deal, 1991, 48).

These assumptions are structural issues that help frame the research relative to the organization context and consulting process. “Process” focuses on *how* members relate and *how* things get done (Schein, 1987, 39). In this case, process focuses on how training becomes integrated in business operations. These structural assumptions add to the earlier assumptions that the organization leaders are ready and willing to change their training.

Other underlying assumptions about the consulting process start with the realization that all organization problems involve networks of people interacting in processes generally aimed at common goals, i.e., the organization’s mission. (Schein, 1968, 10). An accompanying assumption is that most people have some ideas about their problems and potential solutions. Clients, however, often do not know what is really wrong; need help to identify the real problem, and need help to know what help to seek to solve the problem. Savage calls these forms of knowledge “know-how, know-who, know-what, know-why, know-where, and know-when.” (Savage, 1996, 267).

In this case, the leaders surveying the situation had been deliberating over their training problem for some time. The unexpected visit in February 1996 by a consultant they knew and who knew their organization coincidently occurred at a point when they needed to do something about training. The consultant had current know-how with training and needs assessments, had contacts who knew even more about what could be done, and was available and willing to help them address their problem. The timing of the visit led to a contract to help do a training study—the approach was to be a team effort working with people within the organization.

This team approach was important because, as Schein (1988) suggests, organizations work better if internal teams diagnose and manage their own strengths and weaknesses. He has observed that consultants cannot learn enough about an organization's culture to suggest reliable courses of new action; but they can certainly work out options together—that the client has to see/think through the remedy and make the solution decisions. (Schein, 1993, 10). Even though the consultant was familiar with the organization, that experience was dated and limited in scope. This team approach also supported a major objective of passing on knowledge and skills to help individuals in the organization diagnose and fix their own problems, not fix their problems for them or make them dependent upon the consultant—a principle in the consultants consulting philosophy.

Review of these set of assumptions evolve as consultant/researcher lenses analyze the process. These assumptions and framework guide the role of the research while focusing on the initial purpose of this action research: (a) to intervene as a consultant to do a training needs assessment that is valid and useful to the organization; (b) to help leaders decide about recommended courses of action; and (c) to assist organization leaders take action. The training needs assessment resulting from the consultation serves as a baseline to identify and solve immediate problems now and to provide criteria for measuring future program effectiveness. Identifying the effects of the intervention becomes a measure of success in helping the organization leaders solve problems in the short-, and hopefully, long-term.

Ethical Considerations in the Research Process.

The most important considerations in this research are the ethics underpinning the process. They are fundamentally summarized as "Do no harm." Specific considerations distilled from the works of Block (1981), Lippitt & Lippitt (1978), Merriam & Simpson (1989), and Schein (1987 and 1988) are as follows:

• Individuals were told the purpose of the research and how data gathered was to be used with voluntary interactions.

• Intend no negative effects on the individuals or the organization during or subsequent to the research.

• Respect privacy through anonymity and confidentiality where appropriate.

• Establish and maintain professional yet personal interactions in all roles—colleague, consultant, and researcher.

• Participants were provided copies of the TNA and will be given copies of the research dissertation when completed. Draft copies were circulated during the research stages to permit comment and clarification.

These ethical considerations are the conditions upon which the action research is based, supported by wisdom and insights from the literature initially reviewed.

Multi-Method Strategy

A multi-method strategy was designed to blend quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, observations, training sampling, and subject matter analysis. These methods were blended into an action research approach to quickly gather training data the leaders wanted to consider in their strategic planning. This approach framed the research yet allowed flexibility in the process to integrate and adapt methods as needed. Most important, the multi-method strategy allowed active intervention to improve training where appropriate. The researcher served as consulting/researcher, an educator, a resource link, a coach, and a catalyst with individuals who could take actions from the findings.

Multi-Level Needs Assessment Process

A multi-level training needs assessment was designed using the federal government's Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Needs Assessment model. This approach intended to provide data to answer questions about individual, job, and organization levels of training. As a government document, the OPM needs assessment framework provided clear, concise, relevant authority to guide the research process. It was the primary reference initially used within the organization along with other references to supplement learning. The authoritative leverage gained from the OPM Training Needs Assessment Handbook was useful in enlightening members of the organization about more comprehensive, strategic training needs assessments. However, the leaders' narrower questions about what training was being done and was needed in the short term placed emphasis on actions with immediate results.

Over the long term (two-to-five years), organization leaders' may return to this multi-level analysis to further analyze their objective of establishing an education and training program with measures of training effectiveness linked to their strategic planning. This long-range objective none-the-less guided design of a baseline needs assessment that built on an evaluation process model similar to Kirkpatrick’s model that is commonly used in the field. Kirkpatrick’s model has four levels of evaluation which aim to measure: (1) what people like; (2) what people are learning; (3) what gets applied to improve performance; and (4) what is the return on investment of training (Kirkpatrick, 1994, and Holton, 1995, 2). This model was used to evaluate the TNA when it was delivered at the end of the first cycle of action. An improved variation of this model was developed to evaluate the TNA one year later in the third action cycle by asking what individuals 1) expected, 2) provided, 3) received, 4) used, and 5) now need (appendix H).

In addition to looking at three levels of training—individual, job, and organization—this research also incorporated three levels of *need* suggested by Witkin & Altschuld: a) customers; b) organization leaders/decision makers and policy makers; and c) resources or solutions (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995, 10). These three levels of needs and levels of evaluation helped design how the organization’s system would be assessed. Kirkpatrick and Altschuld’s evaluation approaches were integrated with Kim’s Systematic Quality Management Model to help relate elements of the total quality leadership philosophy that have been shaping the organization’s culture since the late 1980s. A model of this integration of levels and needs is conceptualized in figure 3.1.

The traditional model in the top half of the model starts with data, i.e., e.g., the training data in this organization from different levels and needs, moves to synthesis and analysis with insights that lead to recommendations for policy changes and implementation—i.e., the TNA. Shared understanding of this conceptual learning drops into the lower box with a plan to change, check the results, and analyze the action; e.g. leaders decisions to centralize training, hire a training director, and see how training improves.

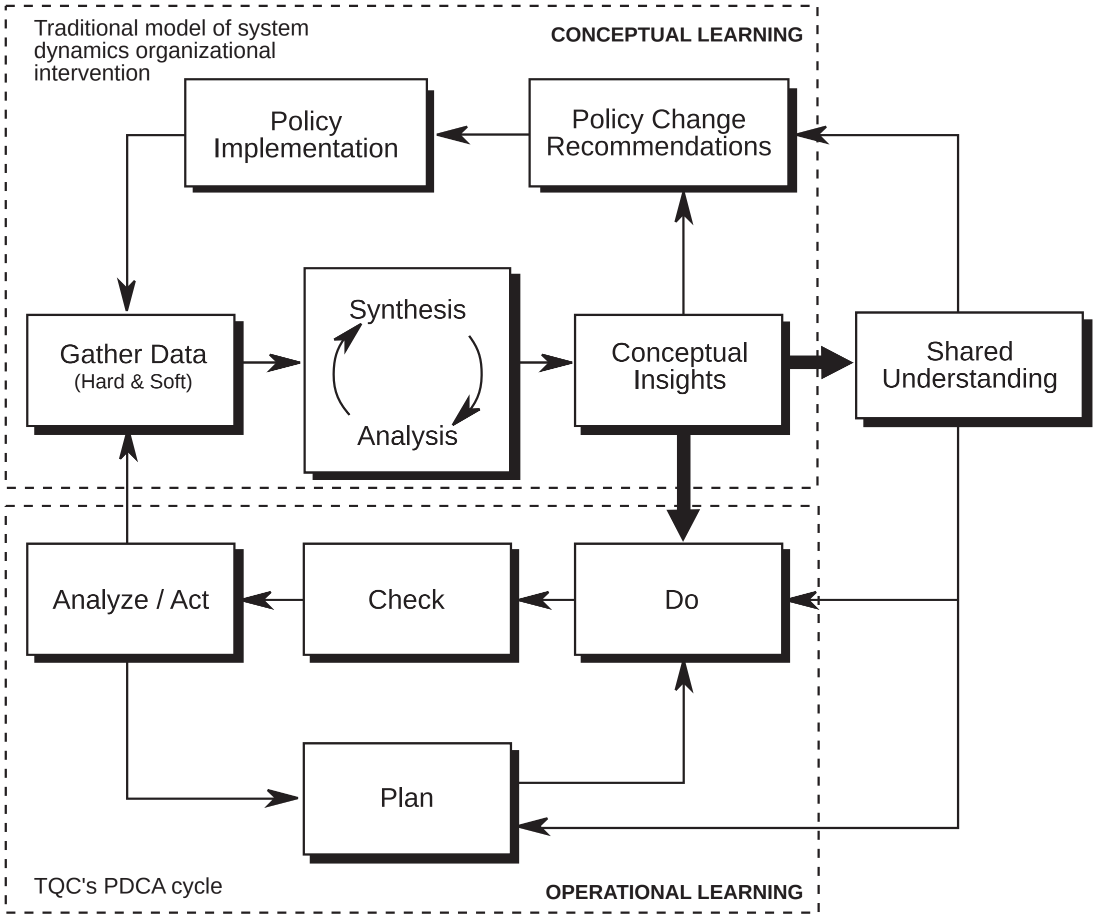


Figure 3.1. Systemic Quality Management Model

Change models reviewed in appendix B were a useful reference for modeling the resulting action. All models were considered before sorting through the models. Walter Shewhart's change model adapted by Deming in the Total Quality Management era seemed to best fit the organization's changing situation as a simplified systems wide framework for this research. The TQL philosophy underlying the action cycles relates need levels and levels of evaluation in the *process* of identifying suppliers (of training in this organization), customers (internal and external recipients of the training) for more effective decisions about how to improve training.

Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) Action Model

Figure 3.2 identifies major actions and learning occurring in each of the three cycles using terminology familiar to the client organization: Plan, Do, Check, Act (Deming, 1982). The actions are represented in an adaptation of Deming's (1982) Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) change model to show the dynamics of the research process.

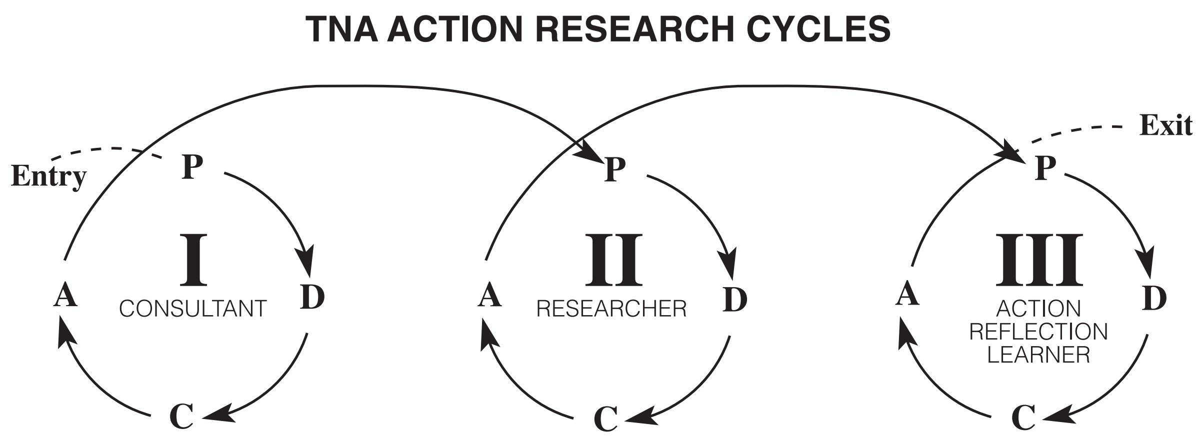


Figure 3.2. TNA Action Research Cycles

In this research the model evolved into three plan-do-check-act cycles as diagramed in figure 3.2. Each step of these action cycles is described in chapter IV, the story of the evolving action and shown in detail in appendix K. The action was initially started and planned to end with delivery of the TNA, the first cycle, then evolved into more indepth action research, and action learning.

Training Needs Assessment Process for This Organization

The senior leaders wanted the initial training data and TNA recommendations within 90 days of the first meeting with the consultant (February 1996). That meant moving to quickly organize a team and plan methods and activities to gather valid, relevant, and useful data. Findings and data were critical to the leaders' strategic planning. With data to revaluate, they could make more informed decisions about whether to continue with the status quo of their distributed training activities, drive reorganization to centralize training, or develop a program combining the best of both distributed and centralized training.

Meeting the 90-day deadline proved challenging but feasible through the combined team efforts of selected training managers, analysts, and focus groups within the organization guided by the research consultant. Other people responsible for training were also identified and involved to provide relevant data. Ideally, these people are a key group to educate and engage in revitalizing and coordinating training efforts within the organization.

Initial diagnosis focused on the leader's concern for first determining what training was being done, by whom, for whom, and at what cost. Next was the need to determine what training needed to be done, pragmatically to support their mission and to meet policy and legal requirements. Findings from these assessments resulted in recommendations on how best to do training within the organization now and for their future changes.

With these problems and needs in mind, an action research plan was designed. The first step was to systematically collect information and structure data for analysis. Next was feedback of findings to the organization leaders for their decision-making about subsequent actions. This action research approach was designed to remain relatively open and flexible to encourage continuous reflection on emerging findings (Patton, 1990).

The strategic framework and process outline for the first cycle of this action research follows. It is also provided in appendix C for ease of reference.

<u>Training Needs Assessment Process Outline</u>

I. Determine the organization's benefits of needs assessment
  A. Identify Key Stakeholders
    1. Deputy Chief Executive Officer
    2. Director/Deputy of Administrative Services
    3. Director, Quality Improvement Office
  B. Identify the change implementers and potential change recipients
  C. Solicit their support—Determine their expectations

II. Plan to conduct a needs assessment
  A. Set Goals/Objectives
    1. Determine what training is being done
    2. Determine what training needs to be done
    3. Recommend how best to do training now and for future move to Memphis
  B. Evaluate the organization's strategic plan relative to training
  C. Identify Key Roles/Team Members
    1. Director, Training and Civilian Support
    2. Director, Quality Improvement Office
    3. Human Resources Development Consultant
  D. Identify Potential Problems/Pitfalls
    1. Incomplete/inaccurate data
    2. Conflicting data
    3. Internal resistance
  E. Evaluate Prior/Other Needs Assessment
    1. Organization assessment team surveys

2. Organization inspection report

F. Prepare plan to conduct needs assessment
   1. Evaluate data regarding training
   2. Define population, identify issues of concern, and prioritize needs
   3. Coordinate resource requirements

III. Conduct Needs Assessment

A. Obtain Needs Assessment Data
   1. Key informants
   2. Interviews
   3. Focus groups
   4. Surveys

B. Analyze data

C. Define Performance Problems/Issues
   1. Occupational groups
   2. Individuals

D. Research integrated performance solutions
   1. Training and development
   2. Organizational Development
   3. Other Human resource solutions

E. Determine Best Training and Development Approach(es)

F. Assess Cost/Benefit of Training & Development Approach(es)—“Business Case”

Plans for ensuring cycles of action developed as decisions were made on TNA recommendations resulting from this first action cycle. Subsequent action plans were open and flexible as decisions, action opportunities, and goals changed. They are described in chapter IV as the actions evolved and were framed for analysis in chapter V.

Data Gathering

Data in this case study come from facts, impressions, beliefs, and feeling related to the organization’s training in order to systematically reach decisions (Patton, 1990). For example, initial data collected for the TNA was oriented toward government and industry standards of reporting to provide a baseline and to permit future trend analysis (1995 Industry Report). Lack of government reporting standards led to a general comparison to industry standards. Data answering the leaders’ questions about what training was being done, by whom, at what cost was compared to the most recent industry report so leaders could begin to evaluate their investments in training (TNA, 1996; appendix G). Each successive action research cycle narrowed the focus to specific actions such as the decisions to centralize training and hire an experienced training director from outside the organization.

Training Data Gathering

The leaders initial questions were “What training is done, by whom, for whom, at what cost?” (Martineau, 1996). The answers required data on demographics of the organization (size and type of business functions) and budget (for materials, facilities, people, and trainees). These data helped frame analysis from survey reports of who gets how much of what type of training. Sources of data were the organization training data files, personnel records and a training survey asking for input from the organization’s training coordinators. Other sources for data were job descriptions, internal reports, performance appraisals, examination reports, and inspection reports. These data formed a baseline for current analysis and for strategic trend analysis. Comparison of these data to government and industry training data (i.e., the 1995 Training Industry Report) put the organization’s training investment into context so the leaders had a way of evaluating the meaning of their training needs assessment data.

Primary methods for doing the training needs assessment were concurrent informal interviews and qualitative observations of the culture, climate, training conditions and interactions using a systematic approach for gathering data to get to the root cause of training problems. Rules for using the data were guided by agreements between the leaders and the consultant that the data would be used to answer their training needs questions and the research questions. Three viewpoints are used. First is the viewpoint to the client in answering the first research question: (1) What is the view, value, and use of the TNA to the organization leaders. Second is the view of the consulting process answering research question (2) What happens when the consultant intervenes with the TNA so that it becomes proactively used by the organization leaders in short and long term actions? The third view reflects action learning that answers research question (3) What may be the organization dynamics that facilitate the adoption of planned change? The research of these questions shaped the actions of the intervention.

Questionnaire and Interviews

The first step in designing the training needs assessment was to interview senior leaders who initiated this research. Following their initial direction, a set of questions at appendix D was adapted from the OPM Needs Assessment Handbook to gain information about the organization’s needs and characteristics. Informal followup interviews were done with the senior leaders to collect and discuss additional insights about their view of the problem(s) and preferred solutions. This provided insight to their thinking. It kept in mind the indications that leaders had opinions about both the real problem(s) to be solved and preferred solutions. For example, one leader said they needed a needs assessment. Another concurred but then said training was more critical. The senior leader, meanwhile, awaited plans he thought would consolidate and centralize the organization's training. All three *wanted* a training needs assessment, but for different reasons with different expectations.

Meeting with the leading stakeholders simultaneously to discuss their needs was requested but never achieved. Therefore, their inputs were triangulated and validated into a cogent plan of action and final report that each agreed met their needs. Identifying these opinions and the strength of their views was important in understanding subsequent change forces driving and restraining future actions, i.e., who really cared about training and why. Informal interviews with these leaders and observations of ensuing behaviors guided the direction of followup questions in the process. The iceberg model of change presented in chapter III evolved from this triangulation as a graphic reminder of individual and organizational dynamics at work.

Listening to the leaders' initial concerns about training identified several possible priorities for action following the training needs assessment. One major issue centered around whether to centralize training efforts or continue decentralized operations. Discussion about the current distributed nature of training touched on differences in the perceived quality of training, accessibility and availability of training, and gaps in what is versus what could be. Lack of coordination within the organization to address these issues appeared to be a common key concern among the leaders. Naturally, they each had differing views about how to solve the problem. Identifying the forces around this issue, followed by actions to change the structure and process were based on findings from the training needs assessment. Establishing a group to guide implementation of the change process became the next major cycle.

Another concern of the organization's senior leaders was adequacy of training for junior personnel as their proficiency examinations and promotion rates were below average. Related to that issue was analysis of employee individual development plans from which to develop training plans for the short term and longer term needs in support of the upcoming move. Another related personnel issue was to design a follow-on survey to help the organization determine critical job training needs for transition training and new hires.

As the training needs assessment process evolved (action cycle 1), these additional concerns were identified as potential actions. Following delivery of the TNA decisions and delays implementing the action resulted in a shift from consulting to research as shown in the action research models described earlier in figure 3.2 (appendix K).

Training Needs Survey

After interviewing the leading stakeholders a modified Training Needs Survey (appendix E) was designed with analysts in the organization to quickly gather data that would answer the leader's questions about training. Data gathered in this cycle also aimed to help answer the senior leaders' underlying question about whether or not to centralize their training. Initial data gathered from the training needs assessment was analyzed, and reported back to the leaders for their deliberation and decision making in the near term and used in followup action cycles. Outcomes from their decisions guided subsequent phases of the action research by prioritizing the most critical problem/process for further action.

Action Research Process and Group Dynamics

Critical to the success of the first and subsequent cycles of this action research, was the formation of a group from among those in the organization most affected by the training problem: current directors of training, management analysts in the organization with experience from previous research into the problem, and a qualified consultant/researcher to guide the process. In action research, groups typically form among those who have the problem (Watkins & Marsick, 1993, 121). Of particular interest is how they form. Less concern was placed on who whey were as in this case the organization had few people with training expertise which is why they hired a consultant.

The traditional model of group development suggested by Tuckman & Jensen (1977) was initially used to understand the group process of forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. As time and actions changed the research, Gersick's phenomenon (1988) was added to analyze the impact of time and transitions within the organization. This organization's study group became potential change agents influencing the strategy, implementation, and receipt of changes to come. Discussion of the training problems from the groups perspective helped get to the root cause of the problems. As individuals and as a group, the team was key in gathering and analyzing the initial data which generated the training needs assessment. Their analysis and feedback to their bosses (particularly the senior leaders with power to change the process) were instrumental to subsequent change actions. This was particularly important as not all saw the training needs assessment as clearly or as compelling as others. Some team members and leaders felt threatened while others were challenged by . Reactions to findings and recommendations were varied and not always openly discussed. Sensitivity to deal with these conditions and feelings as they arose required knowledge, skill, ability, and a positive, persistent attitude on the part of the consultant/researcher.

Researcher's Roles, Attitude, Knowledge, Ability, and Skill (RAKAS)

Leading action research writers point out that the primary instrument in this type of qualitative inquiry is the researcher (Cunningham, 1993, 61; Merriam & Simpson, 1995, 98; Patton, 1990, 14). What this means is the action research design and process is interactive and highly dependent upon the researcher. In this case, the researcher has a three-in-one role: colleague, then consultant, then researcher. The decisions to engage as a consultant/researcher, for example, reflects a personal assessment of the skill, competence, willing attitude, and ability to do the work. The consultant's understanding of the organization's problem(s), maintaining relationships with key leaders, skill in human dynamics and organizational development, and a commitment to help solve the problem are key drivers in this research. With the researcher as the primary instrument, it is important to identify and evaluate the knowledge, skills and abilities that are shaping the research design—i.e., research of the consultant/researcher in action. A change agent taxonomy was developed to identify then used to continually analyze the consulting interventions.

Key change agent roles in this action research include: educating, diagnosing, consulting, linking, thinking and communicating. An expansion of Robert Menzel's taxonomy of change agent skills (1975, 289-291) was designed to identify and assess the range of knowledge, skills and abilities needed and evaluate their potential relevance at various stages of this research. (See appendix F). The RAKAS taxonomy is also helpful in categorizing and analyzing the research actions and levels of learning in the research process.

Roles and Responsibilities

In addition to being a change agent, I had three distinct roles; first as colleague, then consultant, and researcher. This three-in-one role as colleague/consultant/researcher led me to think back over a twenty-six years association with the organization from a variety of positions. The reflection provided insight to the organization's history, culture, values, and heritage that had deeper meaning in unexpected ways. Reflection on the meaning of this extended relationship revealed a subliminal collegial commitment and loyalty to the organization, combined with a timely opportunity to help as consultant/researcher. In that context, my helping responsibilities were intertwined with the roles.

To combine the consultant/researcher role imagine you are looking through a pair of glasses. Imagine one lens is the your view of the consulting action and the other is the research view. Together, the two lenses provide a clearer view than either independently. We do not consciously look through one lenses then another as the two together project an image in the eye, i.e., the intersection consultant/researcher on the colleague . Often, we use lenses to correct for distortions such as near or farsightedness—analogous to biased views in roleplaying.

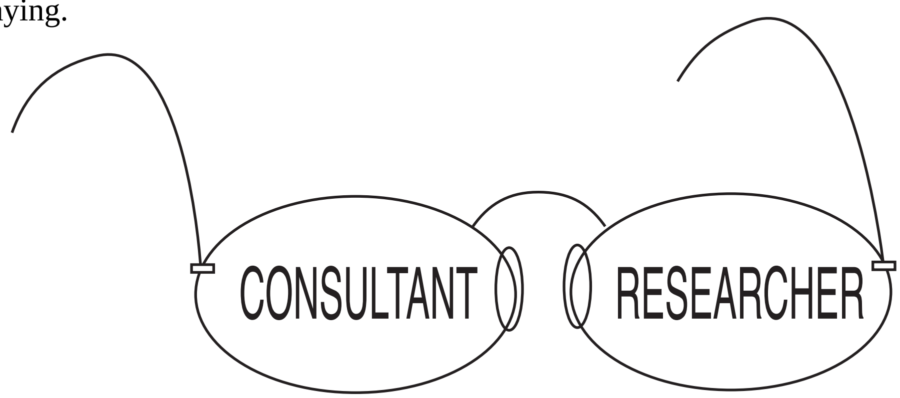


Figure 3.3. The Consultant/Researcher Lenses

Viewfinding

Now imagine what goes on in the mind as we look through the glasses at the consulting actions, research of the consultant, and reflective learning. Record the images as with a video camera. The brain interprets the viewfinding, helping us focus. Now superimpose the roles and action for a three-dimensional perspective as represented in figure 3.4.

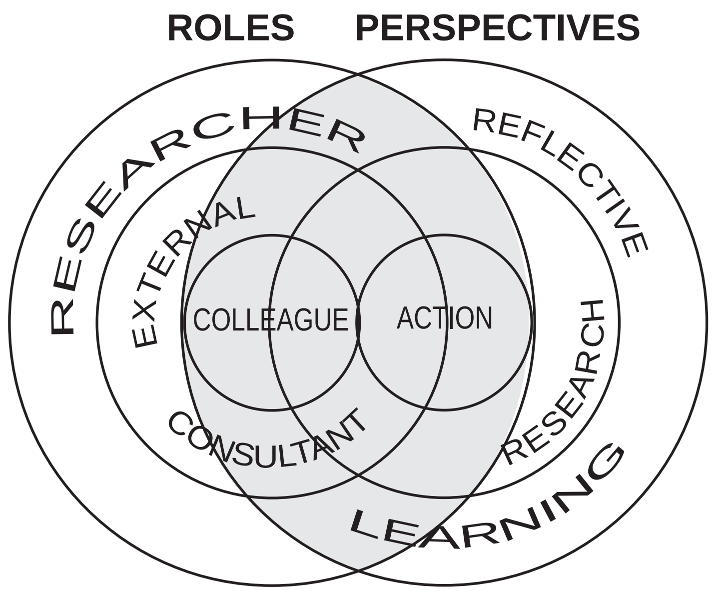


Figure 3.4. Action Research Viewfinder

This overlay of views may seem crosseyed until you imagine it holographically, projecting 3-D images to the brain for interpretation—the whole brain, engaging left brain logic including past experiences with the organization, with right brain creativity of future possibilities. The result helps explain the dynamic process of the research, including insights to inferential thinking, innuendos, and insights to hidden characteristics within the organization iceberg and below the water line.

The shaded overlay of the roles and perspectives represents focusing the 3-D image to see beyond the surface actions and observations to interpret underlying thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. This holographic introspection of the leaders' and researcher is a way to gain insight to forces shaping change within the organization iceberg and identify characteristics below the waterline. The viewfinding provides a holistic look at the context and conditions of the process consulting interventions in the action research and the consultant's transformational learning. Description of the viewfinding actions, research and learning follows in chapter IV with deeper reflection on the research results in chapter V.

In the researcher's three roles, the lenses also reflect different shades and colors ranging from rose to gray, influenced by the researcher's preferences, experience, and learning. These shades reflect a preference to look for the positive side of people and processes (rose-colored glasses). Shades of gray reflect an openness to viewpoints that might otherwise be influenced by the human tendency to value judge things dichotomously, i.e., as black or white, either/or, good or bad, right or wrong.

Viewfinding through wide-angle lenses aims for a systems perspective balanced with a need for sufficient detail to provide descriptive, clear, and accurate portrayal of the consulting/ research process. The systems perspective encompasses elements from structural, political, human relations, and symbolic frames of reference (Bolman & Deal, 1991). The structural and political frames are portrayed through organizational charting of key players and their role and relationships in the hierarchy. The human relations and symbolic frames are portrayed through actions, inactions, and interactions through the story.

The three-in-one viewfinder is a way to understand the complexity of different roles and perspectives influencing research of the action cycles depicted in figure 3.2 as colleague, as consultant, then as researcher engaged in action, research, and reflection. The simplified model represents the dominant action in each of the cycles as action, research, and action learning. In reality, the experience was more chaordic like an atom in continuous motion.

Attitude and Preferences

Already evident in this case study writing are some of the researcher's attitudes, philosophies, and preferences. A fundamental underlying attitude and preference is that of helping individuals and organizations solve real problems, as evident in the choice of this action research.

The research process became a continuous inner journey from the present back to the past then forward with dreams for the future through dialogue with myself and others as the research unfolded. Learning and knowing through the whole being included the soul and heart of what motivated me beyond the contract to consult and write this dissertation. The inner journey involved using all four of my Jungian functions (Myers, 1980): introverted sensing to gather all the details I could and then think about what these meant to me and others in the organization; extraverted feeling through continuous interactions with members of the organization long after the research had ended—a story with no end; and now extraverted intuition and writing what this seems to mean; open to the process but challenged by the uncertainties of worthiness of these reflections as research—so unconventional and open; hesitant to put these reflections on paper, yet, in doing so, gaining a sense of deeper understanding; and learning through the generation of ideas and generalization of ideas across boundaries (Myers, 1980).

Analysis by behavioral temperaments provides the following framework of the experience:

• Caregiving (i**N**tuitive **F**eeling—NF) to feel compassion for less fortunate, e.g. the training staff—overwhelmed and under-resourced;

• Engineering (i**N**tuitive **T**hinking—NT) to create the future organization;

• Building (**S**ensing **J**udging—SJ) to put the people in the reorganization;

• Exploring (**S**ensing **P**erceiving (SP) the vision—negotiating for win-win outcomes.

This type and temperament analysis reminds us how differing gifts from many individuals creates synergy and understanding (Myers, 1980).

Knowledge

To engage in action research of this complexity, the consultant/researcher needed a working understanding of basic theory in research, behavioral science, human resources management and organization development. A well-grounded understanding of action technologies is useful with particular knowledge about action research being essential. Measure of this knowledge is evident in the literature review, methodology, and outcomes from the following chapters of research. Shelf space and file cabinets to hold files and references in this research is another measure of knowledge, but hardly relevant unless accessible. More important are the skills needed to apply the knowledge to effectively deal with the evolving nature of the action research.

Ability and Skill

The consulting skill to develop rapport and trust with people is evident in having entrée to the organization with access and authorization to address real problems. The consulting skills help organization leaders figure out their problem and then decide on further actions to build on this relationship. A preference for diagnostic interventions to describe rather than a confrontational intervention based on evaluations is evident (Schein, 1988, 141). A pragmatic approach to adapt methods from various fields vice chose one over another and to be open with the research, despite the potential trade-offs of time, energy, and expertise is also a matter of methodological preference. A holistic systems thinking orientation and bias toward learning organization development is evident in the choice of models to frame the research. Tolerance for ambiguity is continually tested, stretching the researcher's paradigm in the process.

Bounding the Research

A final methodological concern was how and when to conclude the research. Beginnings and endings are matters of perspective as real stories are bounded by the writer. In reality, the research will be ongoing and cyclical continually assessing and refining the process of establishing and implementing the organization training program, however directly or indirectly the researcher is involved. For purpose of this research, the action cycles were eventually bounded into three action cycles over an 18-month period: 1) the process consulting intervention delivering the TNA; 2) the research of implementing TNA recommendations; and 3) the action reflection learning of the process consulting and research on the whole TNA process (Figure 3.2).

The February 1996 meeting is a clear beginning, though background of the researcher's loyalty and affiliation with the organization could be a case history in itself. Where and when to end the research was dependent upon findings from the training needs assessment, subsequent decisions by the organization's senior leader, along with ability of the consultant/ researcher to continue helping meet the organization's prioritized training needs.

The research began with a training needs assessment and evolved into more extensive action research. A negotiated alternative evolved one year after presentation of the TNA to the senior leaders which encompassed the action of reorganizing to create a director for training position, fill the position, help indoctrinate the new director, and assess/assist in development of a training plan. As the new director becomes established and further actions are defined work supporting improvements will go on, and with it the story of this research.

This research case study reports the action research process and findings. Evaluation of the findings is descriptive with minimal judgement about whether actions are good or bad. This approach is one way of encouraging more holistic case studies where consultants become researchers—continuously improving actions and research. Ironically, the paradox of relating these experiences is knowing how to do a "good" job of research and storytelling. It sounds so simple, but is obviously not or more would be written. “Good,” in this case, means useful and positive; useful to the client and to the researcher, regardless of the outcome, and positive in terms of learning from the actions and results.

This action research methodology adapts traditional scientific research procedures to a dynamic organization problem to produce clear, simple, and timely results: a change improving the organization’s training system. It also expands the way of looking at research problems to a broader systematic approach, focusing on knowledge creation and discovery more than replication and verification (Cunningham, 1993, 7). To this researcher that means focusing on the forest and on the trees. To use another analogy, this research will be more like trying to understand what caused the Holocaust rather than focus on a single issue such as Milgram’s “obedience” research which showed that many people will shock others when so ordered, even when they know it is harmful (Bavelas, 1989, 13). In this case, training is a limb on the organization’s tree in the government forest where winds of change are gathering force.

The research story evolves with a purpose of conducting meaningful research to help leaders in an organization solve their training problem and provide a research opportunity for the consultant/researcher. How the consultant/researcher collaborated to meet the role responsibilities for successful use of the knowledge, skills, and scientifically conducted research, is described in the next chapter, the action research story.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT STORY

Approach and Framework of this Research

This chapter describes the story of this action research: a process consulting intervention in a large federal government organization. It chronicles the time, place, people, and events evident through a three-in-one viewfinder of the researcher, the primary instrument in the research. The three-in-one viewfinder, explained in chapter III (Figure 3.4), is a way to understand the complexity of different roles and perspectives influencing the researcher's actions as colleague, as consultant, then as researcher engaged in action, research, and reflection. The viewfinding provides a holistic look at the context and conditions of action research, process consulting and the consultant's transformational learning.

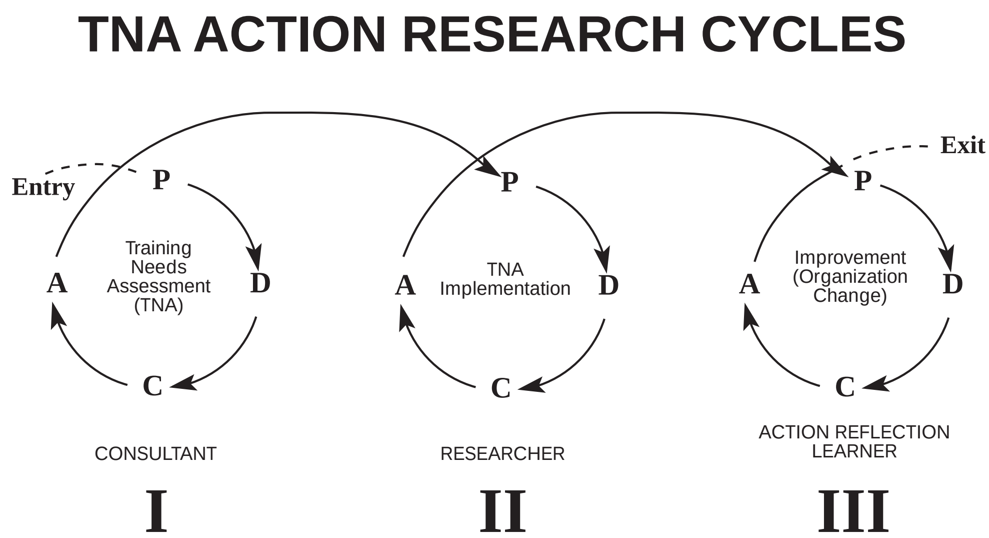
The researcher's three roles viewed through lenses that reflect different shades and colors ranging from rose to gray, influenced by the researcher's preferences, experience, and learning. These shades reflect a preference to look for the positive side of people and processes (rose-colored glasses). Shades of gray reflect an openness to viewpoints that might otherwise be influenced by the human tendency to value judge things dichotomously, i.e., as black or white, either/or, good or bad, right or wrong.

Viewfinding through wide-angle lenses aims for a systems perspective balanced with a need for sufficient detail to provide descriptive, clear, and accurate portrayal of the consulting and research process. The systems perspective encompasses elements from structural, political, human relations, and symbolic frames of reference (Bolman & Deal, 1991). The structural and political frames are portrayed through organizational charting of key players and their role and relationships in the hierarchy. The human relations and symbolic frames are portrayed through actions, inactions, and interactions through the story.

As researcher, my responsibility is telling the story as objectively and holistically as best I sensed and can symbolize the actions in the process. This includes relating conversations and unspoken thoughts and feelings for later analysis (Argyris & Schon, 1996). The events will be recounted in the first person to emphasize process over structure—a conscious contribution to the body of literature on action research and process consulting. Focus will be on perceptions, feelings, relationships, attitudes, norms, and communications in the process. As qualitative researcher Michael Patton has noted, the process of action research becomes the product in the ensuing report of results (Patton, 1990, 374).

TNA Action Research Cycles

This story traces the typical action research steps of “planning, theorizing, learning and development” (Cunningham, 1993, 68) through three evolutionary action cycles over an 18-month period. figure 4.2 identifies major actions and learning occurring in each of the three cycles using terminology familiar to the client organization: Plan, Do, Check, Act (Deming, 1982).



	I	II	III
P —	**PLAN** Training Needs Assessment	**PLAN** Re-organization to hire new director before further action	**PLAN** Realign priorities
D —	**DO** Gather Data	**DO** Create job/site/ relocate	**DO** Connecting the organization
C —	**CHECK** Analyze data and lack of data	**CHECK** Director delay (6 months)	**CHECK** Centralization of Training
A —	**ACT** Organization decides to centralize training	**ACT** Director orientation and TNA review	**ACT** (CHECKING OUT) To hold the gain and implement improved training in D.C. & Memphis. Formally end research

Figure 4.1. Action Research Cycle Steps

The actions are represented in an adaptation of Deming's (1982) Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) change model to show the dynamics of the process. A simplified diagram will be used throughout the chapter to relate the narrative description to the PDCA model through each cycle.

Key Players

Key players and their responsibilities and relationships are shown in figure 4.3. Pseudonyms have been used to provide anonymity to the players and organization. This approach allows candid but confidential coverage of the events and helps avoid the human tendency to stereotype.

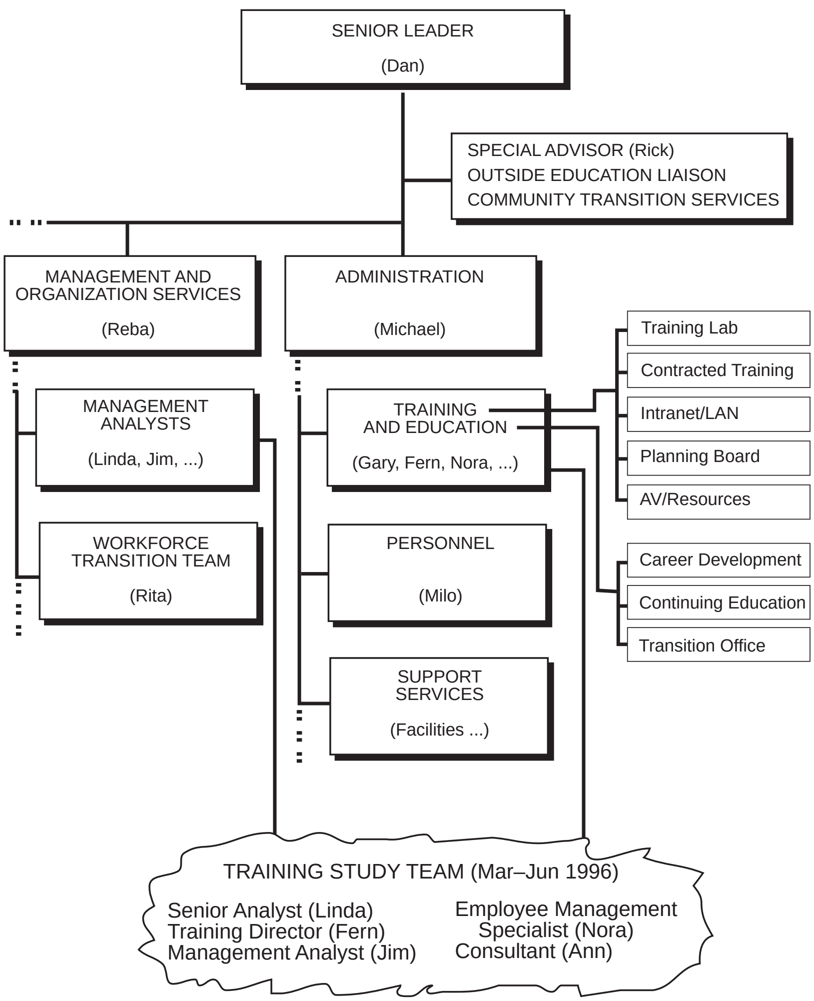


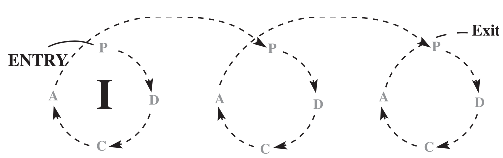
Figure 4.3—Responsibilities and Relationships of Key Players

Key players and their roles in the story are:

Ann	Colleague, consultant, researcher
Reba	Director of Management and Organization (formerly the Quality Management Office); Ann's former boss
Michael	Director of Administration responsible for a training office and staff; works for senior leader
Fern	Director of Civilian Training; works for Michael
Nora	Employee Management Specialist; manages training for Fern
Linda	Senior Organization Analyst; works for Reba
Jim	Management Analyst; works for Reba
Gary	New Director of Training; works for Michael
Other players:	
Rita	Workforce Transition Team Manager
Dan	Senior leader responsible for organization operations
Rick	Special advisor
Milo	Personnel Office Manager

The case study begins with entry into the organization by a former employee, the colleague/consultant/researcher who is now an independent contractor, and proceeds to the point where individuals in the organization plan and continue their own action.

Cycle I—Entry



Late Monday afternoon the 5th of February 1996, I stopped by my former organization in Washington, D.C., to say "Hi" to colleagues and to see how things were going. Reba, the Director of the Quality Improvement Office and my former boss, was wrapping up plans for the next day's monthly Executive Steering Committee (ESC) meeting that she coordinated. Seeing me, she smiled and remarked as she packed her briefcase to go home, what a coincidence my dropping by might be.

As we walked out of her office down the long hallways Reba asked if I might be interested in a job, explaining a training problem was to be discussed in the next afternoons executive meeting that might need expertise like mine to solve. Acknowledging I was available and certainly interested, she asked me to call Michael, the Director of Administration who had responsibility for the problem, to get on his calendar the next morning. Thanking her for the referral I returned to the building to schedule the meeting.

Michael, the Director of Administration, put me on his calendar first thing the next morning. He explained he planned to ask the ESC for authorization to conduct a study of training. The purpose of the study would be to gather training data to help the committee determine the feasibility of centralizing training within the organization to improve training for their upcoming move. He had discussed the plan with Reba to get her opinion and see if her office could provide analyst support. He said she said she could, but they would need some outside expertise. Commenting that the timing of my visit was certainly opportune, Michael asked what I thought of the plan, what experience I had related to this kind of work, and whether I might be interested in helping, conceding the study was going to have to be taken out of their existing, scarce resources. Our conversations proceeded as follows.

Discussion with the Contracting Client

“Good to see you Michael. How are things going?”

“Nice to see you, Ann. Matter of fact, we’ve got quite a challenge on our hands. We’re concerned about our training program and wonder about the feasibility of centralizing it. As you know, the organization is moving to Memphis in 1998. A recent survey indicates only about 25% of the civilian workers are interested in moving. We’re concerned about their transition training: for those going and those not going. Those going may go in their same job, but will have new technology to learn. Or, they may compete for new jobs which means additional training. Those not going may want job retraining which we’re already offering along with placement assistance. But the really critical concern is how best to manage all this training.

“I wrote a memo to the boss last night responding to his request for input on a proposed Training Department. In it I explain there is a lot of training happening in the organization, much of it decentralized in the departments, so we do not have a good handle on what is being done. My recommendation was to first do a brief study to determine the scope of training now performed, i.e., what kind of training is done, who is doing it, who is paying for it, and how much is spent. Second, I recommended a carefully crafted needs assessment survey to determine what kind of training needs to be done, in addition to what's being already done. I need contractor support to help us design a good survey instrument. The survey would be supplemented with focus groups to refine the training needs input. Then we would review the results of the study and needs assessment survey to decide how best to deliver the necessary training and the resource implications involved. I would hope these initiatives could be completed within 60-90 days. What do you think?"

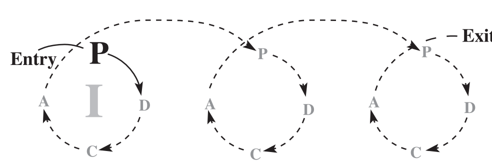
"Michael," I said, " it sounds like you have quite a challenge and a good approach. It's also a lot to do in such a short time. I'm willing to see what can be done. Who would I work with on this?"

"I'll call my Training Director, Fern, and have you two talk about a proposal and contract arrangements."

So began this case study—a training needs assessment as an organization intervention. From a chance visit came the opportunity for a 30-minute interview that concluded with a verbal agreement to contract as a consultant. Michael's plan sounded reasonable, workable, and certainly fit my areas of expertise and interest.

As Michael telephoned his Director of Training and Support to schedule a meeting for her to handle further arrangements, my mind raced through ways to begin framing the work because the 60-90 day clock appeared to have already started. The Director, Fern, was available—most subordinates in this organization are there when their bosses call—and she said I should come on down. So I did.

The Plan—Contract to Consult



Fern, the civilian training director, welcomed me back to the organization in my new role as a consultant. We had known each other through my work two years before when I coordinated Total Quality Leadership (TQL) training within the organization. Our respective offices had coordinated classroom and meeting rooms resources, of which there never seemed to be enough. My former office also went through her office for outside trainer contracting and computer laboratory training. Beyond those functions, I knew little about her business. Now was a chance to learn and assist with issues we had previously discussed but never imagined ever working together to improve.

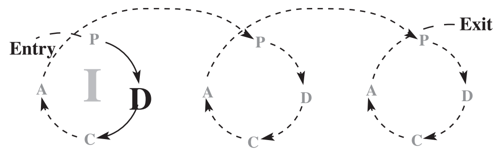
This meeting found me briefing what I had learned from Michael. It seemed to support what Fern explained she had proposed to her boss in a memo a few weeks before but had not gotten any feedback about. My arrival seemed to open an additional line of communications, which over the ensuing 18 months, was used to pass information for action that seemed to otherwise wait for days, sometimes weeks, before being relayed.

Fern confirmed the need for the training study and expressed relief to be getting support for things she wanted to do. Over the next two hours we discussed the organization’s training needs from her perspective, concluding with her starting the process to formalize our working arrangement into a contract. I was to draft a consulting Statement of Work (SOW) and coordinate details of the proposed plan with Reba’s analyst’s office. She would get a copy of the recommendations memo she sent her boss and arrange a meeting room.

Planning thoughts were spinning in my mind as I left Fern’s office and mentally prepared to update Reba on events since our parting the afternoon before. It was near noon and I hoped we could talk over lunch, before her scheduled afternoon meeting with the ESC. The timing was perfect. My third meeting of the day had the advantage of dining and dialogue.

As we walked to lunch, Reba asked how the meeting went. I confirmed what she understood to be needed from her previous conversations with Michael. She indicated that if the ESC approved the plans she was prepared to allocate two analysts full time to do the study: her most experienced analyst, who we later learned had done an earlier study looking at some training in the organization, and another analyst who specialized in outsourcing. I knew both of these individuals from our offices co-location two years before, though, as with Fern, we had never worked together. I could see this study could provide some very interesting learning opportunities.

Do—Data Gathering



During lunch I learned that details of Michael's plan would be under Reba's review because organization effectiveness (OE) was now a part of her office's combined function. Her analysts' work was forming the backbone of the organizations transition plan. She foresaw little problem getting authorization from the executive steering committee that afternoon and would be tasking her analysts' as soon as Michael had concurrence from his boss, the senior leader, and the executive steering committee.

Reba's insights helped identify primary stakeholders, their positions, and the different forces shaping the organization's strategy. Identifying these forces and conditions helped me frame the way the work might proceed. My thoughts needed to fit with their strategic planning. We discussed my statement of work and also began arranging where I could actually start to work. A space with access to a computer was arranged that afternoon so I could begin drafting a statement of work. More permanent working space was to be arranged co-located with her analysts whom I would meet in the next week once plans were approved and their work load adjusted. The senior analyst, I learned, was a part-time employee who worked flexible hours and the other analyst was a full-time employee. This seemed like a workable arrangement to accomplish the task as I could adjust my schedule to meet theirs.

By the end of Tuesday of the first week, I had met with most of the key stakeholders in the training process, drafted a statement of work, and learned the executive steering committee had verbally approved the study to be conducted (appendix E). Having verbally committed to consult, I began planning research to support this work. Library visits, phone conversations, and meetings with other colleagues and faculty members filled the rest of my week. The process was underway to begin work the next week.

Week two continued the literature review in search of government publications on training and assessments to augment my references. From these references I outlined a plan to discuss with Linda, the senior analyst, who had just returned to the organization after an extended leave and was only now learning about this new assignment. We compared information from our meetings and agreed that written memo's from the bosses documenting what they wanted was needed in addition to what they had verbally indicated. I would need confirmation on the statement of work and she would need authorization to begin the survey process to gather data. A team approach was agreed upon, particularly given the 60-90 day timeframe for doing the study. She would meet with the other prospective analyst, Jim, and the Civilian Training Director, Fern, to discuss a strategy and additional team members. I would followup on my proposed statement of work (appendix M) with Fern and begin planning a meeting agenda.

Despite the Director of Administration's intent for the study to begin immediately, memos of authorization confirming what needed to be done, by whom, and by when, did not arrive until week three. Our draft plan was refined and finalized (appendix C). Verbal agreements were reached about prospective team members, calendars were coordinated, and the first formal team meeting scheduled for week four of the case study. The initial players would be those directly tasked with the study. Others would be added as needed and available.

Tuesday morning, 27 February 1996, one month after my initial meeting to contract as a consultant, the first formal team meetings was convened. This was the first of ten meetings subsequently held over the next three months. The initial foursome of myself, the consultant, two analysts, and the Director of Training and Civilian Support was augmented by Nora, an employment management specialist who worked for Fern. The meeting started with introductions and discussion about the study to clarify each other's roles, responsibilities, and resourcing required to meet the objectives.

A team strategy was drafted into a plan of action with milestones to guide the process and give feedback to the leaders authorizing the study. The team members provided the questions to be surveyed. A draft survey was developed for approval and distribution within that week (appendix E). Data collection responsibilities were divided among the team members based on projected sources and who had best access. We allowed one month to collect and report back findings. I offered to coordinate and record our meetings in addition to providing assessment expertise and assistance. We concluded with high expectations about the data to be gathered for analysis over the next month.

Following the team meeting I met again with Michael and Reba to discuss our plan and propose a more in-depth questionnaire for them to consider with the senior leaders (appendix D). Independently, they provided some input to the questions, but discouraged using it with senior leaders at that time—to instead focus on training questions (appendix E).

By our second team meeting a month later (26 March 1996) expectations had been tempered by reality. Despite the request for survey input by mid-March, over half of the organization's divisions had not responded. More time and work was needed to gather the needed information.

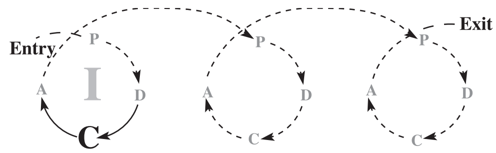
Other problems were identified. Many primary sources such as the training office data banks that we thought would have meaningful training data, didn't, or were inaccessible to provide aggregate data. More important, existing systems were not designed to handle the data requested in the training study survey. Linda, our senior analyst, proposed a workable local data base designed to handle the incoming data. Fern agreed to the new data base, explaining their training data base computer problems were some time away from being fixed.

Our objective to begin analysis was delayed two weeks to gather remaining data. The team also discussed additional training factors that had been identified and needed to be researched, such as indirect training costs for audio visuals, printing, and books. The additional work was delegated along with responsibility for Fern and Linda to advise Michael and Reba, their bosses, of our progress and problems. I provided the team members and their bosses with copies of our meeting minutes to document the process.

By the third team meeting on 09 April, data gathering was progressing but still incomplete. This was interesting because when the bosses were briefed about the incomplete data inputs, they put out e-mail and asked their peer division managers to insure their subordinates responded to the survey. The senior leader had also mentioned it at his weekly staff meeting; that this survey was underway and was important to do. Direct contacts with non-reported division representatives were planned to learn what problems they were having completing the survey. Additionally, some partial reports were followed up to clarify and gather more detail.

An analysis framework for categorizing and formatting data was then discussed. We aimed to relate the data from this study to government or industry standard measures of training. This framework would be used to establish a meaningful baseline that the organization could potentially use in future years for trend analysis.

Checking the Results—Analysis



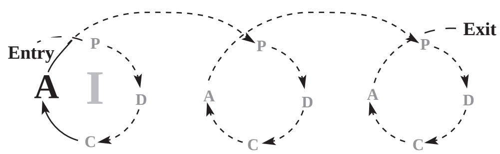
By the fourth meeting on 23 April, six weeks into the study and halfway to the completion deadline, our data gathering was determined to be reasonably complete for final analysis within the time available. The team agreed to note in the report how and where incomplete data might affect some parts of the analysis. Cross tabulations of data to identify correlations by type of training, categories of trainees, or other characteristics was discussed to develop a systems perspective of the organization’s reported training. We also began a briefing outline to augment our storyboard of the training study. Team members were asked to chart their findings to tell the story of the organization’s training at the next meeting in two weeks. Informal discussions through the week led to an impromptu fifth meeting where more data was shared, discussed, and put into perspective to begin drafting the executive summary. My consulting contract was also finally authorized—nearly three months after initiating the processing. A side issue delaying the process had been an attempt by the personnel office to hire me as a temporary employee instead of initiating a consulting contract. Status as a temporary employee would have been easier for them to do but could have complicated my status and other consulting work. After several discussions clarifying the situation, the personnel office resumed the more time consuming contract for consulting services.

May Day 1996, sixty days into the study, the team began finalizing data, deliberating over delays for additional data, and reviewed a draft outline of the training study report and executive summary. The delivery deadline was three weeks away and much drafting needed to be finalized. Draft portions of the initial analysis were shared to informally discuss with the bosses and any others awaiting data who might give feedback on format and final contents of the training study report.

We began weekly formal meetings through May to add data, refine our analyses, review drafts, and collaborate on our findings. Weekend and late night sessions massaged the data and analysis into a final report answering the reader’s questions about the scope of training provided, by whom, for whom, at what cost, and frequency (Training Study of 30 May 1996).

Our concurrent training needs assessment provided findings about what training was needed and an analysis of the system supporting training (Training Needs Assessment, June 1996). The assessment also provided recommendations for action at three levels in the system: strategic actions at the organizational level for the senior leaders, functional job-related actions for managers and supervisors, and individual actions by workers throughout the organization. Major findings about types of training, distributed management, varying requirements for attending, and infrastructure of the training system were addressed. The training needs assessment provided a systems perspective which encompassed surveys and focus group input as initially outlined in the statement of work, and more. That more was provided than requested was the synergistic result of the team's work. How the bosses would review and value the results was to be determined.

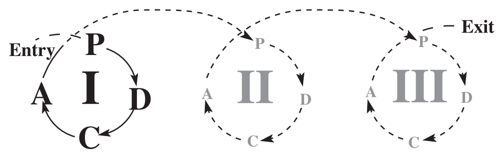
Action—Feedback



The training study and draft training needs assessment were briefed independently the last week of May to Reba and Michael, the primary directors awaiting the findings. The internal training study enumerated data that had been gathered. The 63-page Training Needs Assessment analyzed the data and portrayed the organization's training by type, outlined requirements, documented resourcing, and recommended actions for improvement.

The team gathered informally after each briefing to discuss the feedback. Considerable silence was noted at the briefings as the directors absorbed the scope of information provided. They now had answers to the initial survey questions, and more. They had a lot of data providing a systems perspective. From discussions at those briefings came the sense that this data was interesting, but would it help answer the question "Should the organization's training be centralized or not?" Knowing that annual training per employee averaged 25 hours and $211 (0.2% of the budget), that it was heavily concentrated in management and computer courses, and that it was usually available upon request, but untraceable with the highly distributed management system evident in 27 different funding accounts, suggested improvements could be made to the system. Was centralized training the best solution (in addition to being the now apparent favorite choice of the senior leader)? My concern was why centralization was the question because training could be improved through coordinated leadership. The TNA recommendations encouraged coordination not necessarily centralization.

Evaluation of the TNA

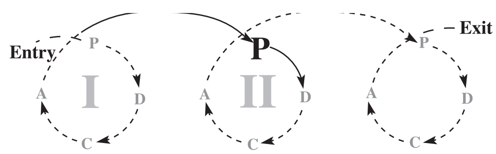


What had become evident was the need for someone to take the lead and coordinate training actions. Recommendations in the draft training needs assessment suggested centralizing several functions of the system: i.e., "organizing a learning resource center to centralize training efforts and coordinate resourcing; add training data gathering to personnel information systems; and link training information through network communications lines" (TNA, June 1997, 2-3). These recommendations (and others regarding training evaluation, individual development plans, and a planning board for training) would cross traditional organization boundaries, which meant centralized training could be beneficial. None of the data, however, directly answered the question of whether to centralize or not. That decision rested with the senior leaders interpretation of the report and training needs assessment. Serious thought was needed.

Suggestions for improving the draft Training Needs Assessment were incorporated the first week of June and copies of the final report were delivered to the team members and leaders authorizing the study. Copies were also given to six managers throughout the organization who had significant parts of the training program or were interested in the results. Copies of the Training Needs Assessment Executive Summary were provided to Reba and Michael for distribution at the next Executive Steering Committee (appendix G). I hoped for an invitation to attend the briefing but sensed that was unlikely since most of the meetings were closed sessions. It appeared that the Training Needs Assessment would be distilled by the directors for information supporting their choice of actions, such as reorganizing and creating a training director position.

The team gathered for a final time, Tuesday, 11 June 1996, three months after the first meeting. We choose a local restaurant to lunch and celebrate completion of the task. Our work as a team was done and work as individuals to implement actions depended on decisions by the senior leaders. Candid comments around the lunch table that day purveyed a concern for what would come next. Pre-briefings had not generated invitations to brief the senior leaders. Michael and Reba retained that responsibility. A “wait-and- see” attitude prevailed which seemed to be fine for the four who had plenty of other work waiting. As the external consultant, I planned to begin work on short- and long-term implementation plans. The next cycle required decisions and direction from the directors about their preferred courses of action.

Cycle II
From TNA to Action Research—Updating the Plan



With the initial contract fulfilled, I was encouraged to continue working under a verbal agreement to help plan implementation of recommended actions. Informal meetings became opportunities to observe and gather feedback on the effects of the training study and needs assessment. During one such mid-June meeting, the directors conceded not having had time yet to review the whole assessment, that it was important, but other issues had taken priority. The candor of the comment identified the trust in our relationship. It also revealed a cultural reality in the organization, that training was important, but other issues were taking precedence. Having observed the critical nature of some of those issues, I deferred pointing out the risk of delayed training actions.

By the end of June, Reba and Michael had reviewed the training reports, discussed aspects with various team members, and decided the magnitude of work to be done would require a senior, experienced education specialist who could also be tasked to centralize training for greater efficiency and effectiveness. In other words, they expected to create a new position consolidating responsibility for all training and centralize training resources under that person’s control. This decision required considerable reorganization and resource realignment. If possible, they would fill the job with someone from within the organization. If no person meeting the qualifications was identified or interested, they would initiate action for outside hiring. This decision required reorganization plans, creation of a job description (which I helped draft), and briefing to the senior leader for authorization.

The directors indicated that decisions on other recommendations would await the new director—that position to be filled by October if their actions were approved. So, July found me reverting to the research role, inputting information about criteria for the new job description, and checking in bi-weekly to see how things were going. Billing for services contracted and completed was submitted. The training needs assessment was compensated; the additional implementation planning and position description work that had been verbally arranged, was not. It was determined to be outside the bounds of the original contract. I chalked that work up as a learning experience reflecting that it had at least allowed me continued access to research.

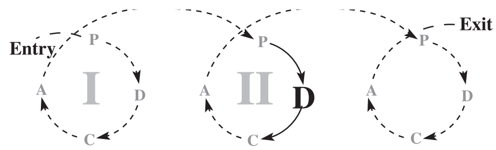
In my research role, I began bi-weekly visits through July and August to track the progress of the hiring plan and assist the directors with other action if needed. They were methodical in developing their plans and timing their proposal for a favorable outcome. Unlike other actions that required senior leaders' immediate action, this one appeared less pressing, and was therefore delayed until an opportune time became available to present the TNA findings.

By early August, the directors had drafted a reorganization plan which included a job description for an experienced training director. This plan needed to be briefed to the senior leader to gain his authorization to hire from outside since no one had been identified within the organization who fully met the new job requirements. Their briefing incorporated findings and recommendations from the training needs assessment. It was scheduled for 6 August, seven months after the initial decision to do the study.

Unfortunately, more pressing issues arose on the senior leaders agenda that preempted Michael from doing the planned briefing. Again, a prevailing attitude was that training was important, but a low priority. Not being privy to all matters political or power wise at that level, I politely listened to Michael's plan to reschedule, respecting the action was his responsibility. Three weeks later, 26 August, Michael finally briefed the plan to reorganize training into a centralized division and hire a director to head the division. The senior leader approved the plan and reportedly expressed pleasure in seeing his initiatives in action. His authorization was a major milestone. It signalled commitment for a reorganization that would involve considerable change and cost.

The next priority was to advertise, screen, interview, and select someone qualified and available to fill the new training director position. The timeframe for filling this new position was revised from October to November 1996. Further implementation action would await the new training director's arrival.

Do—Create Training Director Position and Centralize Training



Actions to reorganize and hire a new director of training were observed throughout the rest of the year. With the training needs assessment as my primary "voice" and no invitation to continue as a consultant, my role as researcher was to observe. What I heard evolving was disconcerting, however, and prompted me to check further on planned actions. The reorganization process appeared to be a traditional reshuffling of jobs rather than a network of existing resources. When I shared this concern with Reba, who was responsible for creating the position, I was assured it had to be done this way to create the position for Michael's office to fill. Once in the job, she said, the new training director would have latitude to centralize the training operation; particularly to adapt the organization's transition plans which were still in flux. Time would tell.

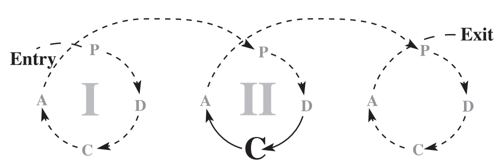
My role as researcher allowed me access yet separation from the selection process. I did this to avoid any perception of influence that could potentially compromise the selection process. Getting the best qualified applicant into the job quickly was one the organization's and my objectives, but not at the risk of biasing the process or jeopardizing relations with colleagues. I knew some of the prospective applicants having mentioned the job to colleagues. In fact, when the job was finally announced on 03 October I provided copies to people who had expressed interest in the job, much like a head hunter would do. I also assured them I would not be in the selection process to avoid their expecting any insider influence. Besides, I was not sure how my recommendations, if offered, would be received or perceived. Accordingly, I chose a prudent, distant role and awaited the hiring decisions by those responsible within the organization.

A second reason for distancing myself from the hiring process was to minimize my human tendency to judge the applicants, much as I was trying to avoid judgement about the leader's reorganization actions. Selection was the responsibility of the organization's leaders. I did not want to bias my viewpoint with personal opinions about candidate evaluation nor did I want to bias the selectee with job expectations of what they should do.

In retrospect, limiting my comments on prospective candidates may have been overly cautious. But from a researcher's standpoint, it seemed the right thing to do. From a processing consulting viewpoint, it was hard to withhold opinions—particularly if there was anything I could do to speed up the process—like helping insure they had ample candidates to consider But I was no longer under contract and had to balance temptation to consult with the responsibility for research. I certainly did not want to lose access to the organization by being perceived as pushy nor biased for or against any candidates.

Although I had provided significant parts of the position description, I wanted to insure the ultimate criteria and selection process met the needs and priorities of the change-makers and implementers. For example, one unique criteria they planned to include was for the selectee to take the job in Washington D.C., then move in that position with the organization to Memphis. This was a crucial factor to build stability into their transition plans. Ironically, the position description did not put that in writing, though the verbal understanding during applicant interviews was reportedly made clear. Applicants knew their job would be in Washington, D.C. until June 1998, then they would be expected to move with the organization to Memphis.

Checking the Results: Waiting and Watching



The new training administrator position (GS-1712-14) was officially advertised 03 October and remained open for three weeks. It reportedly garnered fourteen applicants; six held doctoral degrees—a sign of quality applicants to those managing the hiring process. The personnel office screened the applications and forwarded five of the best qualified candidates to a selection board. The board began interviewing in November to determine the final candidate for the job. But plans to have a new director selected and working by November slid into December, and then to January as interview scheduling prolonged the process. This I know from biweekly visits to update on progress and from comments some prospective candidates made to me after their interviews.

News that a selection had been made was confirmed in early January 1997 during my New Year visit, but no name was released pending final official actions. Administrative complications arose that further delayed news of who to expect when. The good news was that someone was selected who appeared well qualified for the position. The bad news was that the person would not be arriving until February, now a year from the initial action to improve training in the organization. The new director actually arrived mid-March—all the way from another government agency overseas—meaning a doubly different cultural effect.

It was interesting to note people's reactions to news of the prospective director particularly as arrival dates changed and further delayed actions. From a research perspective, it appeared most of the people directly affected took the news nonchalantly. Only Michael had direct influence on the selection process and he appeared to be doing everything he could to properly fill the position. Accordingly, others went about their own business. From a consulting perspective it was agonizing to wait for further action and empathize with those who wondered what affect the delays would have on preparing for the upcoming move. The few who might be making the move were more concerned than those who weren't. There was a general air of resignation until the new director arrived.

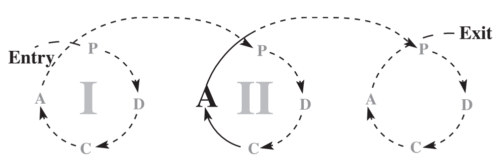
Meantime, another change was noted. Unexpectedly, the training office was scheduled for relocation. A larger office area was authorized by Michael to support the plan to centralize training. Space for eleven people was created. The existing training staff of three relocated to these bigger, newly renovated spaces in mid-December to minimize disruption of training services. This was their third major physical move in a year, their former spaces having been re-carpeted in early 1996, and later disrupted when new furniture arrived mid-1996.

Unfortunately, the relocation also occurred after updates to the organization's telephone directory were made and before phone and computer hookups could be completed. The result was relocation and disrupted service without immediate access. Fixes to these problems would wait until after the new year. Mail, one phone, and face-to-face meetings became the training office staff's main communication links.

Another intended improvement was to centrally locate the new centralized training office near other offices handling training, such as the indoctrination and continuing education programs offices. Unfortunately, the closest available space was at the end of a dead-end hallway. Even though this hallway was right off a main corridor, people would not go by the new office unless they were lost or made an appointment to come to do business. Then, room numbers and door signs were not put up for another six months meaning people really had to know where they going to find the training office. Walk-in business after the move shrunk to almost zero, unlike their former location, which, though it was at the far end of the building, was on a regular walkway many workers used to come and go to work.

In the six months following the October position announcement until to getting it filled in March, no other centralization actions were noted. Distributed, reactive training business appeared to continue as usual, largely through telephone and internal mail arrangements given the disruption of e-mail during the December move. Those responsible for various types of training went about their business responding to requests but waiting for the new director to initiate any further changes.

Act to Orient the New Director



March 1997 was to be a major month for the organization. Reorganization plans for the organization's transition to Memphis were being finalized, letters to all employees were being prepared to determine who actually wanted to go, and Gary, the new training director was finally due to arrive. I looked forward with anticipation to his arrival and subsequent actions to be planned. Most in the organization looked forward with great expectations to his solutions for their training problems.

The Friday before Gary's projected date to arrive, I stopped by the training office to inquire about his orientation schedule and get on his calendar. I was curious to see how the orientation program was working, having identified it as an area for improvement in the TNA the previous June. A major finding had been that not all newly hired personnel were getting formal orientation training. It had reportedly resulted in a directive requiring *all* new employees receive formal orientation training. I was optimistic about the change despite the way it was directed, recognizing that directed change often creates more resistance than actual change. In fact, followup on orientation changes the previous Fall found conflicting reports of whether newly hired personnel were receiving orientation training or not. Those providing the training said some new hires were being scheduled but no one was tracking scheduling or attendance. Training managers said they were waiting for the new director to determine how to centralize the orientation process.

Regardless, I assumed Gary would be receiving a comprehensive orientation to supplement whatever guidance he received during his hiring process. It should orient any new employee—especially the new director—to the mission/culture of the organization. More significantly, it would be his first exposure to training for which he would soon be responsible. From his first impressions would naturally come further actions where I hoped to assist and research.

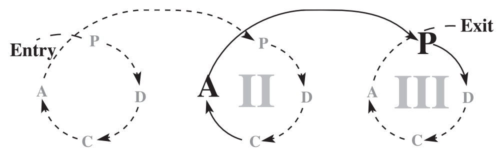
My presumptions about a planned orientation were doused when I learned the training office staff had not heard much about who to expect or when he was to arrive. This revelation reminded me of the communication conduit I had become the previous year between the training office and their administrative boss. Information did not readily flow between these offices either upward or downward. No news seemed to be good news for the boss. His staff tended to their own business and reported when asked.

Delays and confidentiality earlier in the year regarding who the selectee was, and when to expect him, apparently contributed to major communication gaps. The end result was that Fern and her staff learned from me that Gary, their new boss, was due to arrive the next week. Their attitude was surprise and relief to finally hear the news. That this was new news to them led me to suggest they check with their boss, Michael, to be sure. My information was more than a week old and could have changed. I hoped their inquiry might also involve them in whatever orientation had been planned since they apparently had not yet been asked for recommendations.

The next surprise was when Fern called and learned that Michael was also Gary’s sponsor, *and* that he was out for medical tests that might continue through Monday when Gary was due to arrive. Fern was advised that Michael’s assistant was coordinating details so she felt things were under control. To me it appeared that so many changes were occurring in the organization, more people now coming and going, that unless someone was directly affected, they paid little attention—that it was not their business unless someone made it so. Fern seemed content to leave matters as they were until she heard from Michael so I did not push for more information or scheduling action.

Cycle III

Plan to Realign Priorities



Fern's direction came Monday by default when Michael was not only absent for medical tests, but undergoing major surgery that would delay his return to work for nearly a month. Fern became Gary's sponsor with little background on what he had been told or needed. What would she do to help him get oriented? Whatever he needed. Pleasant, congenial gentleman that he seemed to be, he asked for little and listened a lot.

How did I learn this? I arranged to attend an organization event Wednesday of Gary's first week where I hoped he and Michael might be. This arrangement was a potential way of meeting Gary, yet honoring Michael's request two weeks earlier to "give the new guy a few weeks to get oriented before coming by." When Fern saw me at the event she came right over with her new boss and introduced us. She explained that Michael was out for surgery and was glad to see me. My natural tendency to help overrode Michael's earlier request. Michael obviously had not expected to be out so the least I could do was introduce myself and offer assistance.

Fern explained to Gary that I had conducted the training needs assessment, one of the documents Michael had left for him, which he would be getting. Thanking Fern for the introduction and welcoming Gary back to the USA I explained the training needs assessment had helped create his position and congratulated him on his new job. We chatted a bit more about his move from Korea, his background, and my interest in helping him get oriented, particularly with background on the training needs assessment as part of my research. He showed interest in my proposed research, particularly parts that might help their program. He also mentioned a survey he had been given but did not clearly understand. Unsure about what he was referring to, I offered to stop by later in the week to discuss it and bring a copy of my research proposal for his review. As we parted, so Fern could introduce him to others, I gave him my card with the offer to call me if he had any questions. I also promised to visit later in the week.

I decided to make that visit late Friday afternoon to allow for an informal end-of-the-week atmosphere, open-ended on time, to include discussion over dinner if he was interested. Unsure of who was actually sponsoring him now, I was willing to help familiarize him with the area as well as to the organization. Time over dinner could provide more opportunity to learn about his background and get a sense of how best to propose my continued research.

Our hour-long visit that Friday became a decompression of Gary’s first week. He was still adjusting to the time change combined with effects of reverse cultural shock and unexpected findings such as his new bosses unplanned medical absence. Expressing enthusiasm for the job, Gary also chuckled with amazement at all the administration for his in-processing as well as what he was beginning to see was needed in setting up this office. A long evening run, he said, would be a welcome respite from the first week of work. No need for dinner.

Aside from the decompression, Gary was interested in my look at the survey data he had mentioned at our first meeting. It turned out to be an organization assessment survey that had recently been completed for the senior leaders. Michael had reportedly left it to give Gary some background about the organization and to get his interpretation of the findings. I had identified that survey in the Training Needs Assessment as a source of information. Gary now had the second year’s results.

Review of this survey was an opportunity for me to see how things had changed over the year. Our cursory conclusion was there might be meaning in the data, but it needed more analysis than a late Friday afternoon permitted. We left that survey for later discussion and began to talk about training.

I asked Gary if he had a copy of the TNA handy as it referenced the survey we were leaving for later analysis. He handed me his copy as I handed him my promised research proposal. He eagerly took my proposal promising to read it over the weekend, commenting that he was finding the TNA very helpful and hoped he could help in the research. Remembering well his own dissertation process, he promised to tell me more about that another time.

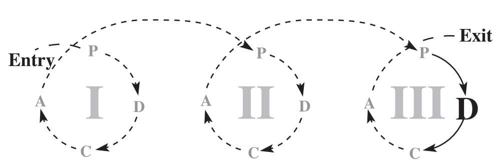
I turned to the section in the TNA where the organization survey was cited and suggested who he might contact to learn more about the survey in the next week. I also mentioned related references that he was welcome to use and offered to bring them on my next visit. He said he was open to all resources, so please bring them by.

The next Tuesday I delivered a box of references, taking time to explain their relevance and potential value in his orientation to the organization. During our visit he explained that his preference for getting oriented was by meeting people personally. He especially looked forward to his boss's return so he could be introduced to the senior leaders. I remarked that he could meet many of the key people at the monthly orientation training. When he asked for more information about it I realized no one had mentioned or scheduled him for orientation training. This realization confirmed my fear that despite identifying the orientation problem a year before, and the supposed directive to insure new personnel attended, no change had occurred. Communications and accountability were obviously still a problem.

This situation was giving Gary a good look at the type of training problems he was inheriting. His reaction was to ask his staff and me for my information. I could not help expressing disappointment that the orientation problem apparently still existed but cast it as his opportunity to learn about and improve the system—that was the reason for hiring someone with his level of expertise. From his own experience Gary could decide how and when to initiate actions for improvement.

Turning to Fern for orientation schedule information, we learned the next orientation class was three weeks away, so we shifted our discussion to key people he could meet before then. Some were people in the organization who had been particularly helpful in the training needs assessment. For example, Reba and her training team analysts whom he had not yet met, could be helpful. I offered to arrange a meeting of the Training Study team. As a team member, Fern concurred with the idea, expressing appreciation for the advice about who Gary should meet in the absence of Michael, their boss.

Do—Renewing the Training Needs Assessment



Given the go-ahead to reconvene the team, I met with each of the members to schedule a mutually convenient meeting time, then sent a followup memo confirming the time, place, agenda, and request that we each plan to update our actions since last June's meeting. The training study team meeting was set for the first week of April in the organization's new training office.

This was the first time the team had been together since the previous June and the first time the analysts had been in the new training office. There was adequate space for the meeting, but an unfortunate lack of furniture. The meeting started awkwardly as people drew chairs from desks into an open area. No table had been found before the meeting so we formed a semicircle.

Gary started the meeting by welcoming everyone and introduced himself. We continued with introductions, our background, and our role on the team. The storyboard of our team's activities was presented so Gary could review the team's work. He thanked the team for gathering and complimented their work. But said he had nothing to ask of them at that time.

In the ensuing silence, I suggested team members provide insight about training representatives in various divisions to help Gary know who to contact. A few names in several divisions were mentioned, then more silence.

Gary concluded the meeting with a thank-you to the team for gathering and indicated he would followup individually when he was more familiar with what he needed. Sadly, I felt the get-together, while well-intended, may have been a waste of time. Gary at least met others in the organization and gained some insights. He now knew who the analysts were that had the data system should he want to followup any aspects of the training measures. In retrospect this was unlikely as action was needed, not more data. The meeting appeared to have been premature, however well intended, to help Gary plan.

Through the rest of April I made weekly visits to the organization to see "how things were going," i.e., what plans were being made that I might shape into the last phase of my research. These informal rounds to my three primary offices (Training, Transition, and Administration) were to assess progress of the training plan, discuss the progress, and share ideas where appropriate.

During those visits, I nurtured hopes that at least one of the recommendations Gary and I discussed in my research proposal would become the final cycle of my research. So much the better if there was an opportunity to do more consulting.

With Michael's continued absence and Gary's unstructured orientation, I encouraged Reba to meet Gary and vice versa. I knew from my weekly rounds that Reba had definite ideas about what training Gary needed to know. As researcher, I wanted Gary to be oriented by the people he now worked for and with; to learn from them what their needs and direction for the organization were, not bias his views with my limited perspectives. I wanted to be more proactive in a consulting role, but doing so could also taint my research and strain collegial relationships. My questions genuinely aimed to learn how things were going, not try to promote or guide their process. Fitting in without being perceived as unduly pushing for action was a delicate balance. I continued regular visits to observe and await insight to Gary's plan.

In Gary's first month, there was a lot of action getting his office settled, moving furniture, connecting phones, hooking up computers, and some initial meetings with individuals in the organization. He had been surprised that his division he headed was still "on paper"—the plan approved in August 1996 that authorized his position. The remainder of the plan awaited his arrival. With only a plan, and a few people, Gary had plenty to do just getting organized, before planning for training.

In conversations, Gary seemed genuinely positive yet candid in discussing how things were going. He explained he was not much of a talker but was happy to answer questions, if he knew the answers. In this situation, he said he had a lot to learn, especially about the organization since it was not quite what he expected. He maintained a positive attitude and pleasant demeanor even when problems occurred like delays in phone and computer hookups and his computer crashing. His philosophy was those things happen so he did not let them get him down, regardless of how they affected his work.

By Gary's second month his plans were beginning to take shape. Michael was back to work picking up action which included introducing Gary to the senior leader. Resource issues could now be addressed, such as centralizing the training budget, authorizing action to fill vacancies, and getting computers and network hookups authorized. Gary got staff members together to prioritize the TNA recommendations. The three priority areas for action were: 1) computer networked training (IT); 2) career planning, and orientation/action officer training, and 3) detailer training.

Gary also received an internship offer from Rick, a senior organization member who wanted to do an education project for graduate credit. This opportunity had the potential of identifying required training for a significant portion of the organization. It might also renew the planning board for training through Rick's access and influence with all the organization's divisions. It would be a logical following up on the organization's second annual assessment that Rick had helped orchestrate.

I had discussed the possibility of organizing a planning board for training with Rick the previous Fall when he arrived as a newcomer. Given all his other responsibilities he chose to defer action until the new training director arrived. We had also discussed the possibility of putting some training questions into the second annual command assessment survey. But there too, he waited. Now was the time for followup. With Gary's guidance Rick outlined a plan of actions which he planned to implement through his own office, promising to keep Gary advised.

Gary continued his orientation meetings with division representatives and genuinely engaged people in discussions to learn what they thought. They reported appreciation for his approach and his value of all opinions even when his training office was criticized for perceived lack of actions. In our conversation he expressed realizing how autonomous the organization's internal divisions were—something he had dubiously remarked about in earlier feedback on the training needs assessment. He was now experiencing decentralized operations firsthand.

Gary's realization about the organizational internal autonomy of structure and operations led him to remark that collapsing the walls of the divisions to centralize training would be like trying to untie the mythological Gordian knot—almost impossible. Like Alexander the Great, he would have to work through the knot, one strand at a time, working with individuals in the organization, one division at a time, avoiding battles over people and budgets until he had worked out the knot.

By May, my meetings with Gary became hit-and-miss as he juggled the settling-in process of getting his office set up, meeting people, receiving his household and office shipments, and getting oriented. Mid-May, after several rescheduled meetings, Gary asked me when I planned to finish my research. Before I could answer he suggested 01 June, the beginning of the organization's official transition period. I was speechless, expecting to become more engaged as his plans were developed, not less. In my initial moments of shocked silence I flashed back to a comment he made in our first meeting in March—that from what he had seen, I probably had researched enough to finish. I also recalled our April meetings when little action had happened other than work to reconnect his communications, setup computer systems, and get hooked to the internet. I had sensed some of his dismay over inaction by senior leaders on his initial recommendations though I was not privy to what he had proposed. I recognized his resignation that the division boundaries where going to be a challenging barrier to centralization. But I was not prepared for his suggestion that I conclude my research this soon.

He went on to tell me that the senior leader had just been promoted and would be leaving in June instead of staying another year to lead the organization to Memphis. That news was an indication that plans for further training actions were likely to be delayed. This leader was the major stakeholder who had initiated the training needs assessment, had authorized the reorganization, and had a vision of a centralized training function under the new director. With him leaving, the vision was bound to change. And, since training was already a low priority, under-resourced, and marginally staffed, efforts had to focus on ways to meet immediate training needs. Gary said he saw his major challenge was to refocus on getting the organization networked for on-line training, something sorely needed and already taking longer that expected. Other actions might have to wait for the new fiscal year, new leadership, and the eventual move to Memphis.

I asked Gary how Rick was progressing with the training survey and planning board for training plans, thinking it might be the most likely action to conclude my research. Regrettably, he said it had foundered. Rick had only held one meeting at which he asked division representatives to give him their training requirements by the following week. Only one representative had responded with meaningful requirements. The others reportedly were not sure how to get the information and asked for more time. Since Rick had other priorities in his job and Gary had been so busy, they had not been able to get together to discuss further action. Because Rick’s work was a voluntary internship Gary indicated he did not plan to push the issue until Rick was ready. They would also see what the new senior leader wanted from training before pushing forward.

This change of events combined with Gary’s apologies for having to reschedule our recent meetings. He obviously felt awkward about my continuing to drop by with so little action related to my research. He did not foresee much progress on recommended actions we had optimistically discussed in March. It seemed presumptuous for me to push for action until he was ready to pursue the actions with resource support from the system. I was not sure what to say and was concerned about his view that my visits had not been more productive—however instructive and enlightening.

Despite these feelings, I felt loyalty to the organization and had a vested interest in follow-on research action and potential contracting work. I was just finishing other consulting work and had hoped to spend more time on-site beginning 01 June—at no cost to the organization, though we had not had time to discuss this because of our missed meetings. My plan was to propose a statement of work later in May once Gary had a more detailed plan. At the least I planned to write my research in the corner office where I had been working the past few months. But we had not discussed any of these possibilities and now he was suggesting I finish. What should I say; what could I do? What would keep this action research from aborting?

Should I offer to work on-site so I could refine my research more directly and provide Gary with insight from the previous years work? For example, the files and references I had delivered in March contained drafts of potential actions related to the training needs assessment recommendations. We had discussed two of the files when Rick proposed his internship. There were more files like those providing background information. If I concluded my research in June those files would probably never be used—a potential waste. What to do?

In response to Gary's suggestions that I wrap up my research by 01 June I countered with a proposal to work through late June when the organization's senior leader was due to depart. Researching a little longer would provide a more natural break and an opportunity to observe the transition process. I recalled an unexpected finding of the TNA was a 70% annual turnover of people. Explaining this sudden change of leadership was characteristic of the organization's culture, it would provide an interesting transition point. Sadly, this leader's early departure was consistent with the pattern that leaders only stayed about two to three years. This leader was leaving before the three year mark.

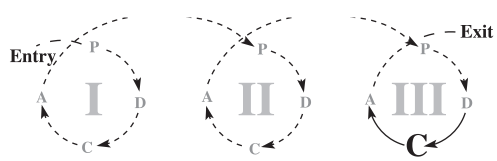
When Gary did not ask if I wanted to continue working in the office I did not press, noting that more staff were arriving and that my working space might soon be needed. As for the references, Gary encouraged me to take them for my research, that it was unlikely he or others would get back to them given the other issues they were working. He did concur with my alternative to visit through June, assuring me my visits were not a bother, though difficult to arrange with his more hectic schedule. Apologizing again for missed meetings the preceding month, he just asked that I call before coming.

Gary grinned after his request that I call ahead and we chuckled over communications in the past month. Calling ahead was easy to do; getting messages through was the problem. The phone system in the new training offices was not always working. With their rearrangement of working spaces, phone lines were being changed. Office staff were more frequently away to meetings necessitating use of answering machines. Knowing what number had a message machine that might get answered became a challenge.

My problems reaching the training staff led me to wonder what problems other people in the organization were having. From outward appearances, a training office no longer existed. Office signs had not been put up indicating their relocation in December, not even at their new site. Names were not posted nor hours of operation until six months later when the problem was identified. On occasion the training office was locked with a note explaining when someone might return.

From an operational viewpoint, however, the relocation, lack of signs, and communications disruptions did not appear to be a problem to others. The training staff was doing business by phone and in meetings while allowing training to continue within each division. In other words, centralized training was not operational. The old training office functions seemed to have faded to a minimum level when their office was moved months before. No major action had replaced division training operations.

Check—Creation of a Centralized Training Office



By mid-June, Gary’s plan narrowed to provide training the divisions weren’t prepared to handle. Workforce transition meeting that he now regularly attended, determined the priority to be orientation training and job training for the increasing number of new hires in three functional areas: computer training, data processing clerks, and detailers. These functional areas had unique skill and knowledge requirements which necessitated specialized on-the-job training. A compounding problem was the increased departure of employees before their replacements arrived meaning those left had to do their more work and help train new employees. Alternate forms of training such as self-paced intranet instruction was increasingly important. Gary described his plan for the functional training problem like a medical triage: setup training on the intranet with continued self-paced instruction, help center response, and classroom instruction to meet immediate needs. These options would provide a range of means for people to get the training they needed and provide a mechanism for beginning to evaluate what was most useful to support the mission. Orientation training now being coordinated in his office, would continue as he inherited it along with the action officer classes that had been transferred from Reba's division. As more staff arrived improvements to content and process would be planned. If that occurred before the move to Memphis, fine. If not, they would do the best they could with what they had. Training, after all, was only one strand in the Gordian knot. Finances and personnel actions were also major strands in the organizations business operations. Through June while I was refining my research data, Gary was busy planning a training staff and still getting intranet training organized. By July, Gary finally had authorization to hire people to fill some of his eleven vacancies.

Gary said the TNA was proving useful in his planning but the bureaucracy was unbelievably burdensome for staffing implementing recommendations. For example, individual development plans and the planning board for training where still tied up in the organization Gordian knot. As we discussed my research questions he referred to a memo he had written to Michael the end of March, his third week in the job, explaining he had used the TNA with his staff to prioritize his recommendations. He assumed I had a copy of the memo but did not have one handy.

I remember Gary mentioning the memo to me in April when I had asked how planning was going. At the time he asked me to wait for a copy until he received a reply, that he didn't want to preempt his boss. His action was understandable at the time, but reminded me I was still an outsider to the organization. His issues weren't my business unless he brought them up for discussion. Gary never said whether he received written reply to his memo, though he alluded to discussions with different people as he tried to figure out why he wasn't getting much action on the recommendations. His intention to share the memo after getting a decision apparently became lost among more immediate problems like difficulties getting phones and computers connected.

A month later in August, when Gary sent me a copy of the memo with his TNA value survey I learned he had addressed 12 major recommendations from the TNA (appendix N). Individual development plans and the planning board for training were in his top four. His first two recommendations were coordinating a learning resource center and initiating individual development plans as a priority, i.e. getting control of training dollars, getting authorization to hire staff to support centralized training and trying to relocate with the transition offsite where computers were already linked to the internet for those moving to optimize computer training.

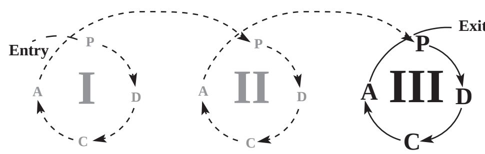
Gary also identified resource limitations in his memo beyond his control that needed attention. Interestingly, his comments about these problems was always positive and focused on why the resistance to recommendations made sense. When he confided those thoughts I shared what I knew about individuals positions on issues and the organization's culture. Having come from overseas and a different environment, Gary was surprised about the differences. What he was experiencing he said helped him to understand the findings and recommendations in the training needs assessment. Things he thought only required his coordination when he arrived actually needed a lot more discussion and planning. Essentially, centralizing training was going to take longer and be much more complex than he and his bosses initially expected.

Though I was familiar with the organization's culture and the training challenges he was juggling, I wasn't sure of the reasons for some of the obstructions Gary was encountering. Like him, I thought more decisions supporting centralized training would have occurred than were evident. Centralizing funding for example was more of a problem along with staffing and getting divisions to collaborate on their training needs. These dynamics dominated our informal discussions as I continued to drop by to refine my research and to see how things were going.

Gary's general plan was briefed by Michael to new senior leader in July. In August Gary personally briefed the new leader on a his plan of action for training reconciling that centralization would probably wait for the move to Memphis. The new leader reportedly concurred with the plan but asked for more detail before allocating further resources. Once again training was said to be important, but in reality, being further delayed. Gary conceded to doing what he could with the few staff and funds available. Intranet connections and on-line-training efforts were progressing to meet the immediate functional training needs. As word of those training efforts paid off, Gary hoped other divisions would link into the training both in Washington, D.C. and in Memphis. This would give him added justification for recommendations awaiting funding and personnel to implement. His meetings and coordination with division representatives were having a positive affect.

From a research perspective, centralized training continued to compete at upper levels with other priority problems and had been determined too tough to tackle right now, i.e., before the move. From my observations, leaders and managers who thought training problems would be solved when the new director arrived were realizing it wasn't quite that simple. Complex change seldom is. The reasons why become more evident in analysis of the case study.

Checking Out—Ending the Research



Having agreed to conclude my research when the senior leader left in June, it was time to reflect on actions relative to the training needs assessment: i.e., what had occurred between February 1996 when the process started and June 1997 when the primary stakeholder left? What meaning could be gleaned to answer the research questions about 1) value of the training needs assessment to the organization leaders, 2) affects of the consulting intervention, 3) dynamics of the change process, and 4) learning by the researcher to contribute to the literature?

Multiple methods of research had allowed me to gather considerable data for analysis. Organizing it into a meaningful framework to accurately describe the case study was important and not predetermined, as structure would have compromised the process of action research. Continued access to the organization through relationships with directors, team members, other colleagues was important to further validate my data.

Throughout the 18 months of research I kept notes of my discussions, observations, and thoughts about the process. Where I found resistance to training actions I probed for reasons respecting that I was no longer under contract as a consultant and that my roles had to be clarified. During visits, or rounds as I call them, I gained multiple perspectives of training actions. Even through the summer of 1997 while writing about the case study I continued to make rounds updating, verifying, and reflecting more deeply on things I had perceived and may have missed. In the process I encouraged continued candid assessments and feedback. I even initiated another survey to key people in the process to determine their views a year after the initial study.

What I learned from this final survey and followup discussions was that Gary had prioritized the TNA recommendations as the basis for his plan of action which was not apparent through actions. In fact, he expressed genuine surprise to my questions about what value the TNA was to him. He said I must think him foolish and anyone else in the organization who did not use that information to their advantage. I was surprised at his reaction having tried to remain objective through my interactions so he did not feel compelled to implement the TNA recommendations particularly before knowing what his bosses expected of him and what other leaders thought of the TNA.

In retrospect I realized when he reacted to my questions, he thought I knew what his March memo had recommended—almost verbatim what the TNA had said. That he had forgotten to give me a copy of the memo became evident in our discussions. I had politely waited for a copy—until August when I asked him for his feedback on the value survey.

My concern that Gary's boss and other leaders had not agreed with the Training Needs Assessment recommendations were also unfounded. Their August value survey feedback confirmed they believed the findings and agreed with most of the recommendations. Their dilemma was in overcoming the inertia to change the system to support the actions. Getting authorization to centralize training, creating a position for a training director, and getting the position filled had taken more time and energy than anyone had expected. But change was happening.

To learn through Gary that he and the leaders concurred with findings of TNA was affirming yet disappointing since so little action had occurred or seemed eminent. Gary explained that his own experiences over the past four months had independently confirmed TNA findings and recommendations in his mind. He described his challenge was to get others to see the situation and raise training to a higher priority in the business operations for the coming fiscal year. That was why he used the analogy of cutting the Gordian knot before getting to centralized training.

The last loop in the cycle is action to hold the gain on what can be learned from this training needs assessment case study. Learning comes from analyzing the complexities of process consulting and dynamics of action research—the next chapter.

Thus ends this case study from the action perspective. The objective of telling the story was as Merriam (1988) suggests of case study research—to provide enough detail of particulars to allow readers to experience the setting of the case and assess the evidence for analysis. The aim was for enough particular description to explain the relationships and interactions to allow analysis of the data and interpret innuendos, inferences, and blindspots. This interpretation integrates description with analysis for meaning—the essential value of the research—our next chapter.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF THE PROCESS, FINDINGS, & RESULTS

Overview

This chapter analyzes the Training Needs Assessment (TNA) process consulting intervention, findings, and results. Analysis will focus through the researcher's three-in-one viewfinder (colleague/consultant/researcher) on the cycles of action described in the previous chapter. Selective coding is used to interpret observations, actions, and reactions that were found (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Analysis also reflects personality, preferences, experience, and reflective learning throughout the action research.

Results are analyzed as viewpoints focusing on the research questions that remind us of the initial purpose of this work: a process consulting intervention to 1) help senior leaders in a large federal organization solve their training problem by 2) providing valid information that would be valued, proactively used, and 3) incorporated into short- and long-term strategic plans. Analysis then goes beyond the action to reflect on learning from the research,

These viewpoints use multiple frames of reference for a systems perspective to discover what occurred and verify what was discovered in the process (Patton, 1990). Why these discoveries are important will be addressed in the concluding chapter.

Frame of Reference

The frame of reference used to answer the research questions was the researcher's systematic observation, interpretation, and action (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Moore, et al, 1985; Schein, 1988). This multi-lensed framework acknowledges the impossibility of observing everything. Therefore, the level, direction and duration of focus were set near to the top of the organization where the major action occurs. This frame of reference also includes potential limitations for perceiving gaps in knowledge, experiences, ability to provide information, and accurately report what has been experienced. Moore and others explain that "frames of reference include all that one believes or knows to be true" (Moore, et al, 1985,10).

Knowing is a continuous process in this case as each reading results in different reflections. For example, this chapter reveals more insights than the description of the case in the previous chapter. This occurs as structure, culture, communications, behaviors, and feedback form contextual patterns in the analysis process.

Observations, actions, interactions, reactions, and interpretations were triangulated to validate accuracy and completeness, then broken down into various categories. A systems perspective (Kim, 1990) framed the case in terms of patterns of behavior over the 18 months, i.e., actions and reactions in the context of individuals roles and responsibilities relative to the TNA. Conceptualizing meaning from this analysis redescribes what appears to have really happened with added insight to how and why—the fit of data and theories in answering the research questions.

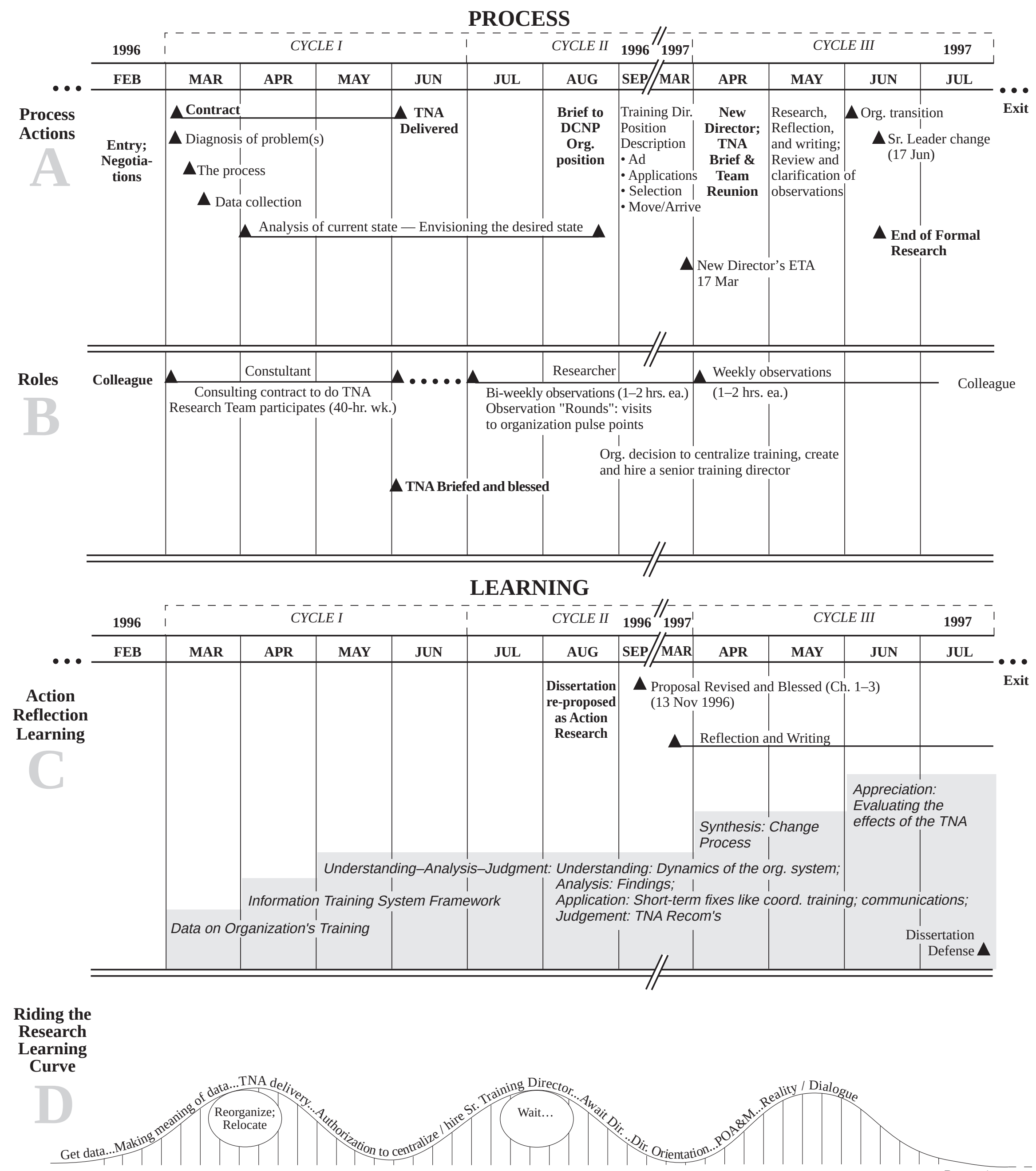
These reflections of what was seen and learned are described through my relationships, attitude/aspirations, knowledge and ability, and skills (RAKAS) in the consulting/research process. A detailed change agent taxonomy of RAKAS used to continually access the consulting actions is provided in appendix F.

Analysis is grounded in ethical practices congruent with process consulting and the organization's culture values (Schein, 1988, 133). The lenses change to adapt to changing roles and actions. For example, emphasis on the consulting action shifted toward research and then action reflection learning as the research interventions moved from facilitating to probing; helping people think differently about their roles, relationships, and future actions. Key assumptions in the process were 1) that people in the organization could be helped to help themselves solve their problems, 2) that this would be more effective than relying on outsiders help, and 3) that people in the process were ready and willing to solve problems by studying themselves.

Analysis of this Case Study—Timelines

Analysis of this TNA case study begins with a timeline showing the boundaries of the 18-month research. The three action cycles within the timeline of the TNA case study are shown in figure 5.1 and provided at appendix J.

Part A of figure 5.1 provides a visual context of the varying lengths of action and their overlay. For example, it shows how early the training needs assessment was delivered relative to eventual actions. This figure also identifies key steps and methods used to gather data for analysis such as diagnosing the problem, collecting data, meetings, decisions, and actions.



This graphic illustrates the researcher's action learning (Revans, 1982). The learning curve looks linear, but is actually chaordic (Hock, 1997).

Figure 5.1. Training Needs Assessment Case Study Timeline

Part B of the timeline represents the researcher's three-in-one viewfinding roles as colleague, consultant, and researcher. The role of contracted consultant for only the first four months of the 18 month period is an interesting reality. Not shown on this timeline, but relevant to the researcher roles and relationship, is a professional association with the organization that began in 1970 and will continue over my lifetime. The role of colleague with key individuals in the organization began in 1992, and there too, will probably extend through their tenure with the organization. This association explains my subconscious commitment to continue helping the organization personally and professional.

Part C shows the action learning process stair-stepped across the research in a classic hierarchy from data-gathering to information, to understanding through analysis, to synthesizing the change process, to appreciation with some evaluation of the TNA effects. Action reflection learning will be analyzed in this chapter and more fully examined in the concluding chapter along with part D, the learning curve roller coaster.

Analyzing/Answering the Research Questions

This structural timeline facilities three viewpoints to answer the research questions. First is the question and viewpoint of the client: “What value is the training needs assessment to the organization senior leaders?” The second view is an analysis of the question about the consulting process: “What happens when the consultant intervenes with the training needs assessment so that it becomes proactively used by the organization leaders in short- and long-term actions?” The third view reflects action learning that identifies and analyzes organization dynamics that facilitate or inhibit adoption of planned change, the third research question. Related technical questions that are also addressed are: how to identify and minimize bias? how to conclude this intervention? and how to determine the most relevant findings contributing to the organizations problem-solving? These viewpoints parallel the three action research cycles that evolved in answering the research questions through the research.

Measures of the Viewpoints

Measures start with determining whether the desired results were achieved: e.g., what actions helped senior leaders in the organization solve their problem? Primary ways of measuring are assessment of the feasibility and effectiveness of the resulting actions. Was the TNA valued and how was it used? Reactions and feelings about the process which generated the TNA among the research participants are assessed in terms of attitudes, norms, and relationships. We review effects of the TNA and the consulting process through three action cycles. Finally, we assess learning from the research relative to recommended theories adopted to guide process consulting. This is a more holistic approach than the usual structural measures of frequency, force fields, or efficiency (Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Viewpoint I: Value of the Training Needs Assessment to the Client

Leaders in the organization contracted with a consultant to conduct a training needs assessment to help them solve their training problem. In particular, they wanted to "determine the feasibility of centralizing...training prior to their relocation...". (Martineau, 1996). Within 90 days the leaders received a study that answered their questions about what training was being done, for whom, by whom, at what cost (Training Study, May 1996). They also received an assessment of what training needed to be done with recommended actions (Training Needs Assessment, June 1996, see appendix G for the Executive Summary). How did the organization leaders view and use the TNA they received?

Over the next 90 days the senior leaders independently discussed and developed a plan for implementing findings and recommendations from the training needs assessment. They decided to recommend centralizing the organizations training and create a directors position to manage the process. They briefed their plan to the organization's top leader who approved the reorganization and authorized funding to make it happen. When the new director of training arrived, he reviewed the TNA, prioritized its recommendations relative to conditions as he perceived them and proceeded to implement his plan.

These actions indicate that the senior leaders valued the TNA. One could ask whether they might have eventually taken these actions without the benefit of the TNA. Feedback about value of the TNA suggest the answer is "not likely". Interviews with the senior decision makers found that the TNA helped them to understand the magnitude of their situation—that more experienced people were needed—hence the decision to reorganize and hire a senior training director to set up and manage the program. Without the TNA, they reportedly would have tried to continue managing the process as before, incrementally adding training when and where requested without addressing systems improvements. With the assessment they had a baseline and recommendations for the new director to step in and take actions to improve training throughout the organization.

How different people viewed, valued and used the TNA is a more appropriate question for action research in addition to what difference it made. Initial feedback from team members and recipients of the assessment affirmed expectations of its' value, then its' utility but also concern as decisions to act were delayed. "How and when would the TNA be used" became a key question as utility and value could be measured through implementation of the recommendations.

A year after delivery of the TNA a value survey of leading change agents and recipients was done to further measure its value to key individuals in the organization (appendix H). A matrix summary of their feedback is represented in figure 5-2 and appendix I. This evaluation data was then compared to responses and feedback the year prior to identify any changes.

Individual feedback in this value survey represent perspectives from three levels of the organization which are typically assessed: individual workers; job managers; and organization leaders (Cunningham, 1993, Kaufman, 1990, Sleezer, 1995, and others). The individuals surveyed also represent three perspectives of needs that Witkin & Altschuld suggest should be considered: customers/trainees; policy makers/leaders/trainers; and resourcers/suppliers (1995, 10).

The values ranged from a minority position of one saying "the jury is still out," to the majority saying the TNA "exceeded all expectations." These data were consistent with initial feedback a year earlier with one addition. Several participants initial optimism reverted to cynicism when inaction and long waiting gave the impression that the assessment recommendations were being ignored or viewed as a low priority.

Valuation appears to correlate with individuals authority levels and feelings of power within the organization, i.e. the higher the individual in the organization hierarchy (refer back to figure 4.3) the more open and optimistic their feedback. This issue is planned for future research as data were unavailable to directly correlate these views. Individuals changed positions in the hierarchy during the research and measures of power were not authorized within the bounds of this research. However, 18 months of interaction revealed how people said they felt about the TNA and what they believed they could do with the recommendations from their positions.

TNA Value Research Survey

1997 Feedback (August 1997)

	Reba *04 Oct*	**Michael** *15 Jul*	**Gary** *12 Aug*	**Linda** *13 Aug*	**Rita** *03 Oct*	**Jim** *15 Aug*	**Milo** *13 Aug*	**Fern**	**Nora**	**Rick**
Expected	Quality product direction and focus on training	Jury is still out. Valued but tough to implement training vision/ centralization	More to have been done upon arrival, e.g., staffing, intranets, etc.	TNA to be viewed as a gold mine to resurrect dead training program	More wide-spread briefing; up, down, and out	TNA to identify and consolidate training and data on who/how much time and money	A complete evaluation of an inactive training program	No written reply	No written reply	No written reply
Provided	As much input/ direction expertise as time allowed	Initial direction; More direction to Gary; Priorities; Leadership	LAN delivery of training to overcome limitations	Information/ statistics	Description of transition/ relocation needs and vision	Provision and analysis of data	Historical data			
Received	Quality product; frameworks for training develop-ment program	Training vision; Support to centralize; Add info tech resources	Generous welcome and seasoned, but weary staff	Perfect road map to revitalize training; Encouragement, guidance and interesting/global analysis	Overview of training requirements, policies and gaps	Understanding of business process of training	Suggestions for improving training—it exceeded all expectations			
Used the TNA to…	Implement/Reorg-anize: Training Mgr to use tech and implement Training Board	To centralize training; bolster training; Hire Sr. Trainer	To direct planning—some now, some later	Reference of statistics	Establish training as key component in staffing and priorities	Reference, guidance, and statistical information	To evaluate current training; Implement recommended improvements			
Obstacles in Using the TNA (Time, Money, Manpower)	Funding; Personnel limits; “Rice bowling” of training programs	Surprised at implementation difficulties; Money/man-power/authority; staff ability; turf battles; other space; authority and funds	Bureaucracy	Lack of direction in implementing TNA recom-mendations; Inability of Training Department; Resignation	No immediate link to organiza-tional strategy	Apparent lack of implementation	[None]			
Lost Benefits (Because of the Obstacles)	Lack of robust training program	Time; Action	Productivity; Potential services; Unnecessary expenditures	Delayed set-up; Lost transition time; Lost corporate knowledge	Issues will be revisited; More time lost	Better utilization and organization of training prior to move for smoother transition	[N/A]			
Potential Benefits (to This Org. from the TNA)	Prioritize training needs; State-of-art training; Professional development resources; Savings in time and money	Reduced redundancies/ efficiencies	Greater team concept for cost savings and better career development	Legal basis for training; Snapshot and diagram of training; Implementation schedule	A baseline for needs and expectations	More accurate accounting; Training gaps; Scheduling; Accountability	More thorough indoctrination/ orientation			
Now I Need	Buy in of concept; Consolidated funds; Hiring authority	More resources (funding, time and manpower); stability	Cooperation and support of ADP; a LAN-based training developer; funds for curriculum	To see implementation	Long-range vision, plan, and strategy for future organization	To know what actions are being taken on the TNA recommendations	Continued support of training			

Figure 5.2. The TNA Value Survey

A related factor was how lengths of time in and remaining with the organization affected individuals opinions and actions/inactions relative to their positions of influence. For example, individuals with positional power staying with the organization took more directive actions and expressed themselves more than those leaving. Careerists closer to retirement than newcomers seemed to take less action and expressed their feelings more confidentially due to the fact that final decisions about retirement or moving with the organization is open until 1998. Confidentiality was necessary to respect individuals options of holding their decision until the 1998 deadline. Measures of these variables may be considered in future research to quantify the dynamics of change, i.e., the effects on ability and willingness to change, Other measures of resistance will be addressed later in this chapter.

The end result of this part of the assessment is that the training needs assessment is valued by leaders in the organization and is being used to help improve the organization’s training. This finding is good news for evaluating the training needs assessment, but how about the effects of the process consulting intervention from a research perspective? Cunningham says “good research” is measured by the degree to which results are used (1993, 25). Let us shift our viewpoint to see how good the research was by analyzing effects of the intervention process, including its evolution from a training needs assessment into action research and learning.

Viewpoint II: Effects of the Process Consulting Intervention

Viewpoint II addresses the research question about process consulting. “What happens when the consultant intervenes with the training needs assessment so that it becomes pro-actively used in short and long term actions?” Analysis goes back to boundaries of time, a look at patterns of actions and timing of actions within the context and culture of the organization.

Time

Evaluating the consulting intervention with traditional measures of time almost proved misleading. Had the research concluded within the first six months as initially planned, the values analyzed in this viewpoint would not have become evident. Reflecting back over 18 months revealed more action and valuing by individuals throughout the organization than was initially evident. For example, the senior leaders taking 90 days to reflect on the assessment worried me as a consultant. Why did they take so much time? Was the TNA inadequate, controversial, too complex, or what? Patience was required to minimize my tendency to jump to conclusions—and often the worst case scenario—a characteristic of my judging personality preference (Myers, 1980). Over longer time, I learned how bureaucracy and cultural biases about training would impede even the best intentions and recommendations in this organization.

Timing is relative in helping this organization transform from a traditional command and control hierarchy where quick actions are expected. For example, expectations for immediate action in this organization evidently exceeded the reality of resourcing and decision making power. Transitioning toward a centralized training system was, however, a significant change step, regardless of how long it takes. The seeds for other training program improvements have been sown in the team members minds and are packaged in the TNA, ready for more sowing and nurturing as conditions permit.

Patterns

Observations over 18 months and reflection back on the history and culture of the organization revealed a pattern of behavior surrounding training. Senior leaders said training was important, especially in planning, but the needs assessment and ensuing research found it consistently to be a low priority in the organization's resourcing and follow-through actions. Expecting this study to generate immediate change conflicted with a cultural reality that training was a low priority. Even though the leaders intended to change training as soon as they had recommendations from the assessment, their actions were to the contrary. Major actions were delayed. On the other hand, several significant changes such as hiring a senior training director did happen. This affirms my belief that change, like time, is relative. The challenge with this finding is learning more ways to identify and measure changes, providing such measurement is deemed relevant by leaders rather than a waste of time.

Other evident patterns were in communication and do-loops dynamics analyzed in the next viewpoint.

Criticality

Another factor in timing and valuing the TNA was that training in the organization did not appear to be a crisis requiring immediate action. People responsible for training said they were ready to change when they initiated the training study. But many people were more content to leave training the way it was, at least until directed to change. The leader's rational reasoning was that more resources were needed before implementing any change. The TNA was a result of rational problem-solving.

This contentment with the status quo correlates with Weisbord's finding that people need to let go of the past as a precondition for moving to change. He found that individuals often hold on to that which they are familiar such as structures, relationships, and ways of doing business (Weisbord, 1987, 268). Donald Schön calls this resistance to change phenomenon "dynamic conservatism...the tendency to fight to remain the same" (1971, 32). These theories relate back to what Kurt Lewin (1964 and 1947) has shown: that feelings, attitudes, and situations are critical to the change process. These conditions influence behavior regardless of what is said.

In this case until those responsible for the change felt they were ready to change to centralize training, it would not happen regardless of their level in the organization. The leaders seemed to want rational justification before deciding to centralize training. Then much thought had to be given to how to centralize training. Such thought involved numerous meetings, discussions, and deliberation. The 90 days taken by managers to decide what action to take and resignation by trainers to wait for directed change appear to be examples of people in denial and contentment who would not be moved until they were ready (Weisbord, 1987, 263). Delays were rationally explained as long as no crisis was tied to the actions. The eventual decision to centralize and hire a more experienced director can be seen as rational, but in fact, further delayed change. Individuals lower in the organization who could have initiated changes to improve their processes also waited, as evident in the failure to implement the directed change that all new hires attend orientation.

Recognizing this behavior helped me see the importance of addressing consequences for inaction in future discussions and reports. During the consulting, I assumed from the leaders statements that action would begin immediately, especially when they asked for help in drafting action plans. So, I did not address consequences in the training needs assessment, emphasizing the positive benefits instead. When actions delayed and combined with concern about how to implement the TNA recommendations I was hesitant to bring up consequences, hoping, as did the leaders, that ensuing delays would be short. Interestingly, my subsequent visits seemed to correlate with leaders eventual actions. This suggests my continued interaction as a researcher served as a catalyst reminding leaders of the need to follow through on the TNA recommendations—i.e., to push to brief the senior leader, to expedite the hiring process, and to relocate the training office to a more central location.

Further value assessment will occur as time passes. Feedback from the individuals in the organization who used the TNA find it provides a useful baseline and guide for further action. Many have also confided opinions about what we would do differently if we were to do the study again. The dynamic nature of the organization assures us that things would be different as a simple result of time, if no other factors changed. To learn what could be done better we need to interpret the organization dynamics affecting change.

Viewpoint III: Organization Dynamics Affecting Change

What are the observable organizational dynamics that facilitate or inhibit the adoption of planned change? Answering this question required refocusing. I reassessed the initial research perspective which focused on gap diagnosis, fast fixes to improve training, and ways to create cooperative action opportunities. Seeing beyond those actions through critical reflection was enlightening.

Riding the Research Learning Curve

The 18-month timeframe of the research described earlier portrays key actions over three cycles. The dynamic, cyclical nature of the process is portrayed in figure 5.3 (see also Part D of appendix J). Realizing the dynamics in this action research comes from experiencing the process like a roller coaster of learning curves.

Figure 5.3. Riding the Research Learning Curve

Riding the research learning curve began as I eagerly “rejoined” the organization expecting to speed through with a training needs assessment, write up the results, and help implement some action. We organized an internal training team within the first month whose logo became a bullet train to symbolize the vision, speed, and direction we were heading. Our logo was formalized on the TNA cover sheet shown in figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4—TNA “Bullet Train” cover

By month two we found our “train” plunged into the depths of data deprivation and nonexistent systems. We climbed up the track from the depths with data analyzed division-by-division to build a framework of the types of training occurring throughout the organization. The team plateaued with delivery of the assessment 90 days down the track where we then found ourselves shunted off on a side rail, waiting. The bullet train had become like a roller coaster, waiting for more passengers to board and help stoke the engine.

While waiting to implement recommendations a decision was made to get a bigger engine to centralize training—i.e., hire a senior, experienced training director. Another decision was made to create a larger, more central location for the newly authorized centralized training office. Looping through the bureaucratic system to maintain communications and check the steam became a six-month cycle waiting for the new training director. His arrival required the organization to regenerate steam and reconnect communications and computer links to get things rolling toward centralized training.

Implementation began moving again twelve months down the track, moving with significantly reduced actions because of recent resource reductions and re-prioritized training requirements. Centralized orientation training and intranet training became the primary priorities with a pilot program planned for clerks and detailers, the two functional areas newly identified as needing immediate on-the-job training support. Other recommended actions were sidelined awaiting future resources; i.e., funds to continue staffing the office and to plan future actions when the organization moves in 1998. Thus ends this ride from a research perspective. More will follow on getting off the roller coaster when I analyze the problem of concluding the research. But next let us analyze the dynamics of this process consulting intervention "ride" on the organization.

Dynamics of the Consulting Intervention

Analysis for dynamic effects will focus where the primary action occurred—through interaction with the team and leaders who influenced the process.

Four individuals teamed with me in the training study (Cycle I of the action research). Fitting in with them, as one of a thousand other employees, was eased by getting reacquainted with former colleagues, some of whom never knew I had been gone. The structure and culture of the organization appeared much as I had left it a year before, even from my new role as a consultant. People were continually moving through the organization in various jobs for various lengths of stay. This 'white-water' dynamic appeared to make my coming and going imperceptible. Fitting in mainly required finding a place with a connected computer and phone number for people to reach me.

My perceptions of fitting in, however, may have been shaded by what Mezirow (1991, 19) calls a "muting of awareness to avoid anxiety". Reflecting on my recollections and research notes made me wonder what blind spots may have blocked my view and created uncertainty and self-deception while I focused on the organizations training. I consciously tried to blend in unobtrusively yet represent my roles honestly. An advantage was a continued sense of commitment and loyalty to the organization. But others did not necessarily see me as I saw myself. What was perceived by some as coaching and cheerleading, for example, was to others an outsider, tolerated for the time, then encouraged to move along while they handled more critical issues. To gain deeper insight I invested more time the latter three months of the research dialoguing about the process with key people and reviewing different sources such as minutes of meetings to get a deeper look at perceptions of issues and actions potentially missed or muted. I also did the followup TNA value survey discussed earlier to triangulate and validate the findings.

Group Dynamics

The classic dynamics of Tuckman's (1965) group development stages were evident through the team's interaction. The initial training study group was organized as a team to complete the work by the end of May 1996. Beyond that date, some members did not know if/or when they might be further involved. We were only chartered to work as a team until the study was done.

We *formed* around the task, *stormed* about how to gather and analyze data, *normed* to create a data structure when none was found to exist, then *performed* to contribute what we could, including peaking about the 45-day point, midway through the research to insure we would complete on time (Gersick, 1988). *Adjournment* in June 1996 was rather anticlimactic. A celebration luncheon was held to recognize conclusion of the work, i.e., delivery of the results. But our relationships transcended the teamwork. This was particularly significant as two members expected to be involved in following action. The other two wondered if they would be called to help brief the finding. I was asked to continue consulting work on an implementation plan, a verbal extension of my contract, only to find a month later that the contract could not be extended. Fading out as a consultant to the role of researcher became a subtle process and virtually undiscussible, so as not to jeopardize continued research.

Uncertainty over what would become of the TNA created anxiety among the members. All expressed hope for immediate action and waited to answer questions and take further action. But there was little feedback or action from higher-up. With no reason to continue meeting, individuals in the organization reverted back to their regular routines. Their reactions roller coastered, too, but for different reasons as their feedback a year later revealed. When the decision was reached in August 1996 to centralize training, then hire a training director, hope for more action was revived. A year later, August 1997, a more conservative attitude prevailed. Regardless, relationships and informal research continues.

Dynamics of Collaborative Relationships

Brooks & Watkins emphasize the importance of collaborative relationships within the organization when doing this type of research (1994).

I had the advantage of being a worker in the organization before coming back in the roles of consultant and researcher. Developing and maintaining those collegial relationships was important personally and professionally. Returning to work as a consultant allowed me to continue developing and sharing with people who cared about the organization. Self-assessment of my help, the process consultation intervention and follow-on research, became a more conscious process—the RAKAS of my profession—practicing roles, attitudes, knowledge, abilities, and skills as a human resource development consultant.

As I worked with individuals in the organization a synergy developed reflecting degrees of trust and shared values for doing the best that we could. The issue of trust is particularly important since it had significant impact on communications. With some individuals there became a growing sense of openness and candor. With others, there was a respectful distance with only occasional glimpses of insight reminding me of personality differences and that I was, now, an outsider. Heightened awareness to these dynamics throughout the research generated personal feelings ranging from exuberance to despair as I empathized with the team and organization leaders. Those feelings were especially evident as I changed roles from consultant to researcher. It was like going from the front car to the rear while moving on the track, then being sidetracked, wanting to push for action rather than patiently wait for the new director. These feelings also reflect my preferences.

Self Assessment and Effects of Preferences

Analysis of my viewpoint as an **E**xtraverted **S**ensing **F**eeling **J**udger (ESFJ) personality reveals type preferences at work in various stages of the action research (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator). Ironically, demands of the changing situation required extensive use of my less preferred intuitive and thinking functions. Critical reflection of my shadow, the introverted, intuitive, thinking, perceiving dimensions, became particularly challenging as this generated self-doubt yet growing self-confidence as I analyzed the process stages.

Contracting stage

My preference for **I**ntroverted **S**ensing (IS) found me prone to focusing on present problems, steps to be taken, milestones, deliverables, and contract and charter details. That is, I wanted more time in the process to get to know senior leaders/stakeholders who, of different types and very busy, were less accessible. My need was not necessarily their need. **E**xtraverted **F**eeling (EF) in the contracting stage was a people-oriented process as I networked, getting to know key people, get updates on situations, organize a team, get people's reactions to the situation, identified stakeholder's real issues, chartered the team for legitimacy, and gathered information from people throughout the organization. This is the stage where I may have naively "rushed in where angels fear to tread". My eagerness to help is now more tempered with a knowledgeable understanding of what else is involved.

Diagnosis stage

My **S**ensing (S) pushed for facts, accuracy, examples, documented data on resources (budget, facilities, people, and number of courses, hours, etc.) and meetings (minutes and observations about meetings, reaction, and reflections). My i**N**tuitive (N) function identified and adapted mental models to look for trends: a systems perspective. My **T**hinking (T) function tried to withhold opinions and clarify cause and effect relationships. The **F**eeling (F) function sought out lots of opinions, persisted with contacting individuals that analysts could not get to respond, regarded people's positions and predicaments, and agonized over how to help some I found to be helpless.

Implementation stage

My **S**ensing (S) led to documenting a history of the organization—the context of the culture; identifying major milestones and timelines; emphasized concern for bottom-line results; developing changed tactics such as the planning board for training; and individual development plans. My I**N**tuitive (N) function focused on the organization mission as leaders decisions, delays, and inaction appeared contrary to their stated intentions. Additional visits were scheduled to learn reasons for perceived resistance; to understand their situation and identify their expectations of the new director relative to the TNA recommendations.

My **T**hinking (T) function sought standard ways to implement and ease the process. My extraverted **F**eeling (F) preference related to values and people in the process; especially noting individuals illnesses, absences, and attitudes. I tried to equitably reflect contributions from all team members as significant though some were more productive than others. We celebrated the TNA completion, and have continued to dialogue about our feelings well after the study was done.

Analysis by behavioral temperaments provides the following framework of the experience:

• Caregiving (i**N**tuitive **F**eeling—NF) to feel compassion for less fortunate, e.g. the training staff—overwhelmed and under-resourced but carrying on;

• Engineering (i**N**tuitive **T**hinking—NT) to support creating the future organization despite time delay and resource limitations;

• Building (**S**ensing **J**udging—SJ) to put the people in the reorganization process;

• Exploring (**S**ensing **P**erceiving (SP) the vision—negotiating for win-win training improvements.

This type and temperament analysis reminds us how differing gifts from many individuals creates synergy and understanding (Myers, 1980). Analysis of this area continues informally as new members join the organization, learn and share their type, and create new action groups. Collective group type (McAleer,, 1988) exploration is part of a plan for future research.

Consciously and subliminally assessing my knowledge, skills, and abilities led to a more realistic understanding of the consulting process and complexities of change than when I started. My less preferred intuitive thinking functions, for example, have become more evident in my consulting practice though my sensing judging temperament still prevails. I have a greater appreciation for cultural influences, for example, and less concern for methodological orthodoxy, a problem I was not aware of until part way through the research.

Methodological Orthodoxy

My ESFJ type preference generated concern for methodological orthodoxy and contributed to feelings of anxiety. This was particularly evident at the end of the first cycle when the TNA was delivered but resulted in delated actions. Personally and professionally I wanted to do things right and was concerned about what were the right things, as a colleague, as a consultant, and as a researcher. Keeping these three roles in perspective, for example, was a challenge, sometimes resulting in inaction as a researcher when I wanted to be more proactive as a consultant. One colleague confided that waiting for a new director rather than pushing for more immediate action with people in the organization may have been a missed opportunity. Conversely, other colleagues said sowing seeds, nurturing them frequently during my visits, and letting them take root in their own time may have created a more effective change process than trying to direct change. Kanter and others remind me, for example, there are more failed change efforts resulting from directed change than apparent successes (Kanter, Stein & Jick, 1993). So, who is to say what is right and a success and what is wrong and a failure? The point being, perceptions are relative. In this type of research answers to such musing are tough to know and may be inappropriate—that balancing actions as circumstances dictate is the art—tempered with the reality that one cannot please all the people all the time. In this case, the majority found value in the more patient, proactive approach than may have occurred with a stronger push for change (TNA Value Survey, appendix H).

Change from Within

Pushing for change as a consultant (the "selling" side of the business) could have led to more directed change by leaders within the organization. As it was, some of their directed changes indirectly rationalized from the TNA—e.g. “All new hires will attend orientation training”, did not result in intended change. The underlying reason directed change failed was later related to a lack of direction about who would be accountable for insuring the change occurred. Everyone seemed to agree all new hires should attend training but no one was responsible for making it happened, let alone determine why it wasn’t happening, as was revealed when the new training director was welcomed with no planned orientation. Regardless, I was encouraged by helping people in the organization take charge of some change; to express their mutual dilemmas, to make their own choices about when and how to improve their work environment. Even to take no action was significant. For example, I observed the leaders change from saying “We need a training needs assessment to take action as soon as possible” to six months later saying “Let’s wait for the new director before implementing further recommendations.”

The paradoxes of changing training varied. Transformational learning occurred as some people constructively expressed their feelings, moving from what Weisbord describes to be confusion and uncertainty to renewal and commitment (Weisbord, 1987, 269). This paradox became more apparent in peoples attitudes about whether to centralize training or not. Once the decision to centralize was made, people were energized and optimistic, then the problem became when and how centralization would occur. Ironically, centralizing training was a minor issue in most peoples minds. Most were concerned with whether or not to move with the organization at all. Their individual decisions to go or not go would then determine how much training of what type would be needed and when—a potentially more critical issue than whether or not the organization should have centralized training.

Regardless of individuals' decisions, I observed over the 18 months that once individuals reached a decision, their renewal and commitment provided a burst of energy around whatever they were doing. It was evident when the training team was organized to do the TNA, when the decision was reached to centralize training, when new office spaces were created, and when the new director arrived. But the energy quickly ebbed in between times waiting for decisions about further actions. Expectations of a process consulting bullet train changed into a roller coaster ride through action research.

Dynamic Effects On the Research

Bounding the research was as Sleezer (1992) suggests, a challenging part of this action research. Entry was clear and quick but existing is virtual. The expectation created by a requirement to deliver a product in 90 days was that follow-on action would be immediate. For nine months to pass before further significant action occurred significantly changed the nature and duration of the research. My consulting contract concluded after three months. I worked an additional month on a verbal contract extension then reverted to the role of researcher awaiting and indirectly influencing the organization's decisions. The open-ended nature of the inquiry required a high tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty that tested my tolerance and trust in the eventual outcomes. A paradox of designing the action research after the process consultation meant planning for possibilities of what might be done (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Patton, 1990, 196). I had to remain open to emerging possibilities if and when they occurred.

Turning from consultant proactively promoting change to researcher indirectly influencing the process became a tenuous position. Uncertainty of leaders views and value of the TNA as a tool to help them improve training was one complicating factor. Another factor was lack of clarity about what I should or could do as a researcher to allow a natural progression of events, not direct change leaders' might later regret.

The delay and disappointment felt by members of the team from perceived inaction within the organization contributed to my sense of the TNA not being valued. Even after senior leaders decided to hire a director for training, I was not sure how they viewed and valued the TNA. Worse, I may have contributed to the uncertainty by not promoting recommendations more proactively. I wanted the decisions to truly be the organization leaders based on their view of the assessment by the whole team, not just attributed to an outside consultant, regardless of how strongly I believed the recommendations were the right things to do. Concerns leaders' did voice about various recommendations became opportunities for me to seek deeper understanding of what was going on and why.

Principal leaders' let me know their reservations about two major recommendations in the TNA. One had a bad experience with Individual Development Plans (IDP) being wasted work in a previous organization. Another leader was not sure a Planning Board for Training (PBFT) would be more productive than other meetings being held. Individual dialogue to identify alternatives to these reservations foundered after a time—some reasons for objections were based on strongly held beliefs that could not be further explained.

I respected such reasons and continued looking for workable alternatives. For example, the leaders' were not sure from their experience that some of the recommendations were viable. When they eventually decided to recommend hiring a new director I sensed they hoped a new person might provide some new options. Respecting their opinions, and their responsibility for ensuing actions, I eventually limited my discussions to just asking how things were going and let conversations evolve from there. When the new director arrived I encouraged him to get the leaders expectations for training. That his boss was unexpectedly away for three weeks complicated the situation. I suggested others who could fill in with their perspectives.

Despite limiting my discussions, I did insure the new training director received a copy of the TNA to review during his first week. I also gave him a copy of my related research proposal, offering support where needed. After reading my research proposal, he commented that I probably had enough to conclude because the TNA in itself seemed a worthwhile piece of research. He also indicated he was not sure what would be happening for awhile. Countering with the hope of doing one more action, I later learned he was genuinely trying to help me conclude my research, not trying to put me off as a well-meaning but outside consultant. Regardless, I continued weekly visits to observe and plan for a concluding cycle of research action. Potential consulting and more learning were worth the effort. However, since I was not on site daily nor involved in direct actions at that point, my main voice was whatever came from the TNA and related interactions. Continuous dialogue about how things were going provided opportunities to plant seeds, nurture them during weekly visits, and further reflect on how things really were going.

During the last cycle of the research, I provided references and files collected in my research to supplement the new training director's orientation. We discussed his general plans as he learned the culture and prioritized training needs with this staff. He mentioned a plan of action for his boss that he would share with me once he had feedback on his recommendations. He did not offer any details, however, and I did not press to see if the TNA played in his plans. I did not want to bias his thinking or give the impression that I was pushing for a contract. But I did hope for some concluding research action.

Finally, in his third month on the job I asked the new director for his candid reassessment of the TNA. He was shocked. He thought I knew he was following the TNA recommendations —that he and his staff had prioritized them for action during his second week in the job—that it was the basis for the plan of actions he submitted to his boss. He also thought I had a copy. That I did not have a copy of his memo was news to him. While waiting for his bosses feedback on the plan several things had happened. First, his computer crashed erasing everything he had written. Second, he received unexpected resistance rather than a formal reply to his memo. Without an administrative staff to handle paperwork, he did not worry about paper. He began focusing on the reasons for resistance. He forgot about promising to give me a copy of the memo plan once he had a reply. The result was a lesson in communications and assumptions.

In the meantime, I continued weekly visits to learn what was happening and awaited his plan. Over his first three months we generally chatted about how things were going. He shared insights about continued staff shortages, intranet connectivity problems, lack of fund coordination, his computer crashing, and of course his bosses prolonged absence for health reasons. He handled this combination of problems along with multiple cultural shocks optimistically, though increasingly resigned as the months went on. But his assumption that I knew he was using the TNA, and my assumption that he was not talking to me about the TNA because it was not useful or he was too polite to tell me, was a major miscommunication.

I finally received the director's plan of action memo in August when he mailed a copy as a quick reference to his August feedback on the value of the TNA. We chuckled over the irony of communications during a concluding lunch in September marveling at how our assumptions affected our perceptions. Better late than never.

From a research standpoint that memo reinforced the organization's value of the TNA. But it revealed that training was still a low priority, slower in changing than anyone in the organization cared to believe.

Interpretation of the Viewpoints

To determine what is most relevant from these viewpoint answering the research questions I went back to the basics in multiple disciplines to critically reflect on the research and organize what would be written. Interpreting the viewpoints involved review of structure and process to define content. Models of change represented in the action research cycles (appendix K) and organizational change (appendix L) were two significant constructs to frame my integration and theory of practice. Space and time took on new dimensions, especially as the research neared the end. I bound the story earlier in chronological timelines (appendix J) but there is a "Spirit of the time" called Zeitgeist that became increasingly apparent. Spady and Bell (1996, 109) describe it as transcending rational clock time. Savage (1996, 267) calls it "human time" and explains that it reflects the rhythm and tempo of happenings more analogous to the seasons and knowing when is the right time for things. He expands the concept into what he calls "knowledging"—more than just knowing something—
it involves knowing who, knowing how, knowing what, knowing why, and knowing where and knowing when (Savage, 1996, 256).

Knowledging in this case study transcends timelines. It gets into deeper meanings as we look back in the past and project forward into the future seeking meaning in our experience—another three-in-one trilogy. Walsch (1995, 3) explains the trilogy involves fuller, more accurate communications of feelings, thoughts, and experiences. For me that meant continuing the research and reporting a more holistic perspective. It involved the different frameworks described earlier and multiple intelligences suggested by Gardner (1995) and especially emotional intelligence recently recognized by Goleman (1995). This learning has been portrayed in description of the experience through thoughts, diagrams, and feelings. Deeper expression is also possible through metaphors.

Meaning in Metaphors

Much of my reflective learning involves experiencing and knowing things that are not easily explained in words but powerfully understood symbolically (Bolman & Deal, 1991) or as metaphors—experience that leads one to believe in something that may only be substantiated by faith or fear—participating while learning (Bateson, 1994). A vivid example was describing the research experience like a roller coaster. The TNA action cycle was a gradual accumulation of data (climbing up the track) to a high level of expectations based on data only to be plummeted into uncertainty and sidetracked waiting for reorganization.

My ‘knowing’ is a complex process of reflective learning similar to what my parents have taught me about farming and a gifted graphic friend calls “cornfield mentality”, i.e. common sense. The farm metaphor involves being tuned to the land (organizational culture) and seasons (cycles) to know what to plant (recommendations), watching the weather to know when to plant (around crises), finding the right fields (open minds), sowing just enough seeds (ideas) at the right depth (keep it simple), recognizing from the parable of the sower that some things will grow better than others (Luke 8.5), tending the fields (listening and dialogue) nurturing with sunshine (positive attitudes) and fertilizing (recognition of progress rather than focusing on shortfalls). Other metaphors of this process are herding cows (watching out for fresh manure/BS while moving the herd down the path toward...Abilene?, going where no one really wanted to go (Harvey, 1988). Or something like herding cats, virtually impossible to manage as Bennis (1997) suggests.

The farming metaphor was evident in my actions and thoughts helping me realize that in consulting with this organization I really hoped to help them create a learning field. My efforts to help lead this change was evident in trying to help the head buffalo (the senior leader who initiated the change to improve training but left to lead a bigger flock midway through the process). He aimed to influence enough of the herd to try flying like geese, recognizing the need to change the lead as circumstances changed (Belasco, 1993). To a degree, the senior leader and others in the organization succeeded. When he left, another leader stepped in to keep the flock headed in the same general direction. At lower levels of leadership, when some were unexpectedly away, others filled the slot and kept flying. As one leader sidelined by unexpected surgery confided, it was not easy being away, but it was gratifying to see how others took the lead to carry on.

From a distance and over time these human dynamics became more evident. They are the forces of change that most intrigued me and I hope are both recognized and remembered: to understand the way leaders in the organization dealt with changes not only to improve training, but to improve their organization as a whole. Many organization members are more content to stay on familiar water than take wing and fly with change. They need to recognized and respected as their apparent floating disguises furious paddling beneath the waterline to keep things afloat and moving along. As newcomers join the flock replacing those who have flown to other jobs there is also a need to focus on contributions all have had in the organization, recognizing much work remains to be done.

So, what do these learning metaphors mean in terms of a systems perspective evaluating the TNA consulting process? A reanalysis of the rational side of the research process is required.

Re-Evaluating the TNA

During the analysis phase of this research I identified my need for more quantitative measures of the TNA from participants. Interviews and observations were insightful, but potentially muted. When I received written feedback it seemed more objective and concrete; i.e., rational and defendable. I had succeeded in getting some written feedback the year before and had not pressed those who only verbalized their thoughts. The problem was I was not sure they were telling me how they really felt, that platitudes were easier than critical analysis. Our collegial relationships may have kept some information from being shared with me as the consultant and researcher along with closely held insights about the organization because I was an outsider. A year after delivery seemed to be a good time to pursue this question.

To search for these insights, i.e., rational documentation of potentially irrational or subjective opinions, I designed and administered an open-ended TNA value survey (appendix H). Feedback from the survey provided additional data on views, value, and use of the TNA for analysis and an opportune way conclude the research. Designed primarily to further assess the value of the TNA, the survey also provided a final opportunity to dialogue about issues that may have previously been undiscussible. Analysis and discussions did disclose some interesting perspectives and muted issues—from within the organization and some of my own muting.

Undiscussible and muted information centered heavily around structural limitations and some human dynamics. Introverted leaders provided written feedback and accommodated a structured interview session. Extraverted leaders provided written feedback and frequently expounded on their opinions about what they and others did or wished could have been done with the TNA recommendations. Extraverts were also more vocal about what others could have done—a rational human tendency also noted in the consulting/research action/inactions. On the training director issue, for example, I offered consulting advice about criteria for the position but did not offer advice about who to select as training director nor was I asked. Helping determine the criteria for selection seemed sufficient. On other occasions when I offered unsolicited information, it sometimes generated defensive responses. I preferred to avoid creating defensiveness, though I recognize it is often an effective indicator of what really needs attention, particularly when I later saw positive results from such encounters. One example was my suggestion that the new director be included in meetings so he could meet and hear what the principles from other departments were saying. The idea was not favorably received because he was at a lower level and they said they already had too many people in the meetings. However, the proposal was reconsidered when I pointed out the training director's bosses extended absence for medical reasons appeared to be creating communications gaps on information he and they needed.

Another example of muting and a potential undiscussible was my attempt to understand resistance to recommendations for the Individual Development Plans (IDP) and Planning Board For Training (PBFT). Searching deeper for individuals reasons for resistance was met with defensive responses that indicated my timing was not right. When the recommendations were foreclosed by decisions not to act, pushing for reasons why, was subdued. Later informal discussions to explore their alternatives found biases from previous experiences. Discussion about these recommendations also revealed a natural tendency of leaders to focus on short-term actions within their area of responsibility. The IDP and PBFT, and many other TNA recommendations, required collaboration with others. These recommendations also involved work which they doubted having immediate benefits. Objecting to more meetings or work without commensurate improvements was a natural reaction, however counter to long term benefits. Those who objected were focusing on what training should be done, not what personnel function or individuals needs should be addressed.

These examples portray how human dynamics in the research were continuous and required instantaneous reflection, decisions, and actions about what to say or not say in the course of events. The research process provided a structured way to reflect on the encounters and develop followup actions, whether for more dialogue or patience, while ideas took root.

Dealing with attempts to help in instances like these where help are not always welcome is a continuous consulting challenge. As Beckhard and the Lippett brothers found “Help is never really help unless it is perceived as ‘helpful’ by the person on the receiving end—regardless of the good intention or reputation of the helper or consultant” (Beckhard, 1971, 2; Lippitt & Lippitt, 1978, 106).

Some muting was factored by time. The leaders needed time to put the recommendations in perspective. Unfortunately, until people knew what critical functions and personnel were needed little more could be done besides improve the system to support training. On the other hand, my reluctance at the time to push for their real objections when they arose reflected my preference to avoid confrontations, especially when my opinions and expertise were not asked. Later, followup discussion gleaned insights to their objections, usually when leaders had more time to think and discuss their positions. I had made my points in the assessment report and had to be cognizant of when to push for further action during my visits, much like they were careful in timing their briefing to the senior leader, when he had time to listen and reflect, not when he was stressed with other crises.

These reflections remind me of the importance of developing confrontation skills to address peoples real reasons for doing or not doing things. Working more proactively with a positive perspective on benefits and forecasting consequences of inaction is one way my later interactions with leaders helped keep the TNA recommendations in action. They have become more favorably disposed toward implementing IPD’s and the PBFT’s, especially as their new director for training independently promotes the benefits of these initiatives. Change is slow but happening.

Reassessing the Action Research Paradigm

In this research process I initially succumbed to the traditions/habits of theoreticians whose works were referenced to guide my actions. My quest to learn better ways to consult by following the works of others who had conducted naturalistic inquiry was understandable. But this approach may have muted my responses to the situational dynamics. When my contract to do the TNA was done, for example, I found myself hesitating to push for more action partially out of fear of their rejecting the TNA and out of fear of contaminating the research process with real or perceived attempts to control the action. Being proactive as a consultant under contract was different from reflecting as the action researcher assessing how the leaders viewed, valued and would use the TNA to improve their training. Continued visits to discuss options and progress eventually helped them to a decision which was to centralize training. Creating an internal position to direct the training vice continuing to hire consulting services put my roles in potential conflict.

Attempts to push for action as a researcher could be misperceived as pushing for further contracts of consulting service. Even efforts to open their minds to a more systematic view-point with multiple methods and models could be viewed as meddling and muddying the water with more than they expected. Simplifying my role and actions to more research than consulting is evident in the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle of change (Deming 1982, 88), as a way to describe the intervention processes. The PDCA model also helped me sort out role conflict and frame the cycles of research through some dynamic and unexpected changes. But leaders in the organization wanted action, not models, or so they said. On one hand their inaction contributed to the training problem, on the other hand, their actions are leading to system improvements.

Another theoretical undoing may have been in framing the research as problem-solving. Though problem-solving is the traditional approach of action research, I now realize problem-solving is a pessimistic viewpoint. A preferred approach would be imagining the future with process improvements—the essence of Total Quality Leadership and it’s Plan-Do-Check-Act cycles—provided the improvements look from a systems perspective, unbounded by existing organization paradigms (such as the industrial age hierarchy characteristic of this federal agency). Imagining the future creates energy and optimism where problem-solving drains energy by looking at the negative side of situations (Lippitt, R., 1983; and Weisbord, 1987).

But problem-solving behavior is a classic management approach and particularly characteristic of the sensing-judging temperament, my preference along with about one-third of the American general population and over half of the leaders in this organization (Wiechert, 1997). Changing the way we look at situations after so many years practicing traditional problem-solving is a major challenge.

Reframing the Research

Reframing the research into process improvement as suggested by Deming (1982), Kim (1990, 1997) and Weisbord (1987 and 1995), was one intention with the TNA. But the resulting actions and decisions focused on problem-solving. For example, the decision to centralize training and hire a new director was the chosen solution to the training problem rather than improving some processes. Such action is a characteristic decision in hierarchical organizations (Savage, 1996); dynamic conservatism of wanting yet resisting change (Weisbord, 1987, and Schon, 1971). Process improvements such as shortening the training request process through centralizing training are still part of the bureaucratic Gordian Knot the new director is trying to cut through. The TNA identified processes for improvement with recommendations developed through the consultation with the training study team, hoping to enlighten and empower them in their jobs and with leaders of the transition team. Some of the recommended improvements have taken root, others await better timing, more resources, and renewed interest and energy.

Linking training to the organization's strategic transition planning was even tougher to do. Informal visits to transition team members became part of the my rounds to see how training improvements were spreading and nurture those recommendations taking root in the transition process. Copies of the TNA were readily provided to transition team members, for example, and anyone else evenly remotely interested in helping link training more strategically within the organization. TNA recommendations (seeds) were packaged ready for the right time and person to cultivate them.

My role as consultant was contracted to help leaders through a traditional rational problem-solving approach. The TNA produced in the process stretched that paradigm. But dynamic conservatism coupled with a tendency to initially avoid confrontation and to follow traditional research theoretical approaches, may have limited effectiveness of the interventions.

The low status of training changes reveals that the total quality leadership philosophy in my mind paradoxically conflicted to some of my own inactions as I conformed to the organization's rational way of doing business, which by the way, has reverted from emphasis on total quality leadership to organization management. Pushing beyond their paradigm to envision a learning organization was risky. A more effective approach to promoting future change is engaging more directly in the organizations transition meetings to create the future, as the new director of training was encouraged to do and is now doing. Such a futures oriented approach will certainly become my choice in subsequent interventions.

Revising the Action Research Paradigm

Along with a futures approach to further research is the opportunity to change process steps. PDCA is a rational approach modeled from the industrial era as are the other change models found in my mental model analysis (See appendix B). But is it the most effective way we to do business, including research as an important part of business? Has PDCA become so problem focused or results oriented that it too limits the ways needed to do and report action research in the future? Is a revised paradigm needed to integrate multiple models and get beyond do-loops into real learning about interaction of complex processes?

Action research in this organization finds the TQM/PDCA approach to process improvement overshadowed by operational survival and rational debates about traditional functional alignment: i.e. realignment for the relocation of positions regardless of the people. Centralized training now appears to be one of the first actions in a series of realignments to help create a more efficient and effective organization. But the realignment turmoil helps us focus inquiry into individual change which is a more critical link than aggregate organizational change (Argyris & Schon, 1996, 200).

Reviewing the findings in this research relative to change theories leads me to realize that individuals change before organizations change, though organizations do influence individuals to change (Trudell, 1997, 15). For some the issue becomes like the argument of which came first, the chicken or the egg. In this case it may not matter. This organization's change is occurring one individual at a time, over time, regardless of the cause-effect relationship that initiates or impedes the change. The leaders are dealing with increased complexity and increasingly dynamic interactions as people argue over which positions should go or not, and as newcomers arrive to replace those already gone. Collaborating with leaders struggling to meet the mission with fewer people while trying to plan for improved critical processes where causal links are obscured is exceedingly challenging. Getting candid dialogue about critical processes training supports through this research is one way of helping. Helping the organization leaders is a focus on individuals. Refocusing on their interpersonal relationships could help, if realignment can be done.

Nirenberg has found that conventional organization structures suboptimize human resources through underlying principles such as hierarchical roles and relationships. This happens when organizations separate thinking (managerial function) from doing (worker function), treat education and training as labor, and attempt to channel communications which creates resentment and alienation (Nirenberg, 1997). These characteristics were evident in this organization. Moving from a hierarchical organization framework to building reciprocal, balanced, interactive relationships within the organization through this research is helping improve training processes. Is such a change reasonable to pursue?

The Challenge for This Organization

The organization's challenge is not only their physical relocation but also their transition from a traditional hierarchical structure to what Charles Savage (1996) describes as a knowledge networking enterprise, what Senge and others call a learning organization. The leverage of knowledge workers will require knowledge transfusions to new hires that will transcend traditional boundaries. Centralized training with networked communications will help the transfusion process once the right types of knowledge are captured. Centralizing will be a continuous, and in some aspects, a virtual process, even after the organization relocates due to the realignment changes and systems still to be connected with training.

In trying to transition from the existing hierarchical structure, which now includes a planned centralized training office, organization leaders may perpetuate the very fragmentation they are trying to overcome. Pulling people from divisions to centralize training in one office is not necessarily improving the way training is done though it is one way to try and break down division operational barriers, build partnerships, and capitalize on workers wisdom. The reorganization is centralizing some training, but is also making it potentially less accessible on the job where informal training has been occurring and will continue to be needed. The organization leaders may realize the centralization dilemma if they look at similar centralization efforts over the years (e.g. their personnel operations). On one hand, addressing past personnel centralization is outside the bounds of the TNA case study; paradoxically such reorganization seems to be a central issue of strategic needs assessment to determine how the organization typically makes changes to become more efficient and effective. Are they creating a pendulum pattern from decentralization to centralization? From a systems perspective, the outcomes of centralizing training appear counter to the expectations; real causes may be camouflaged by a false sense of action (Mollinger in Argyris & Schon, 1996, 233).

My goal is to continue learning and helping this organization and others to more fully assess their situation; to become more systems oriented, principle centered (Covey, 1990), and eventually focus on the five learning disciplines of a learning organization (Senge et al, 1994, 7). Through personal mastery, mental modeling, shared visioning, team learning, and systems thinking, individual and organization improvements analyzed in this research, will continue.
I am committed to practice these five disciplines as a lifelong learner on a never-ending developmental path...to expand my own capacity to hold and seek a vision, to reflect and inquire, to build collective capabilities, and to understand systems (Covey, 1990; Savage, 1996; Senge, et al, 1994, 7).

My quest and professional role is to keep the wheel of learning turning...tuned to the rhythms, tempo, and timing of organizations like those described in this case study. I had hopes of helping the organization transform into a learning organization when I started. Simply learning what constitutes a learning organization for myself made it hard to risk such a radical approach with my client organization. Inaction, defensive reactions and uncertainty of outcomes may have contributed to the organization’s subsequent limited actions, along with their bureaucratic constraints. But learning from this research provides deeper insights to future consulting/research actions. Peter Block and Edgar Schein’s models for process consulting that I initially followed now have far greater meaning (Block, 1981; Schein, 1987, 1988).

From analysis of the research questions in this chapter we now move to critically reflect on what has been learned in summarizing the research.

CHAPTER VI
ACTION RESEARCH LEARNING SUMMARY

> Ultimately process consultation is a philosophy of a perspective on how to provide help to human systems, not a technology or a given intervention style. The role that a consultant will find himself [sic] playing in different kinds of organizational settings and at different stages in a consulting process will vary widely, but the philosophy of maintaining a process consultation orientation toward all those roles and settings is a feasible and, in my view, desirable way to maximize help (Schein, 1987, 205).

The "way to maximize help" in this action research of a process consulting intervention was as Edgar Schein concludes in his second volume on process consultation: "a philosophy of maintaining a process consultation orientation" (Schein, 1987, 205). For me Schein's words were a beginning—a beginning to really understand what such a philosophy entails; to put into practice a process consulting philosophy integrated with my philosophy of adult education; to help lead the way into the information era by challenging federal hierarchies with courage and persistence while learning; and to empower those I worked with to appreciate their roles in the process, to validate their cause, and to support their planned changes, as suggested by Stubblefield and Keane (1994, 272). The research used espoused theories (Argyris, 1991) from adult education, organizational behavior, and human dynamics. The result is this action research case study of process consultation focused through a research viewfinder, shaped by interaction with the client organization, and now written for networks of professionals helping to improve human systems.

Overview of the Research

This chapter provides an overview of the research and summarizes the essence of what was done and what can be learned about maintaining a process consultation orientation, about training needs assessments, about complex change in organizations, and about action research.

Purpose

The initial purpose of the process consulting intervention was to help leaders of a large federal agency solve their training problem by providing valid information that would be valued, proactively used, and incorporated into their strategic plans. The process consulting intervention produced a training needs assessment (TNA) as a way to help find and solve the real problem(s) within the organization and learn better ways of knowing how to help individuals in organizations help themselves.

Assumptions

Key assumptions in the research process were that people in the organization could help themselves and that they were ready to solve their training problem. These assumptions were challenged and found limited by structural and human dynamics in the process. These findings reshaped the research to learn more about the practice of training needs assessments, consulting interventions as action research, organization change, and action learning. The findings also led to refinement of the research questions: 1) How do the organization leaders view, value and use the TNA?; 2) what happens when the consultant/researcher intervenes with the TNA: and 3) what are the organization dynamics that facilitate or inhibit the adoption of planned change?.

Methodology

Three cycles of actions evolved from a natural and holistic action research process. As such, the process departed from conventional research methods by focusing on development of new skills and approaches to solving problems (Isaac & Michaels, 1981, 42). This resulting research documents one way of expanding action research and consulting practice paradigms; to develop new models integrating and describing more holistic research findings; to capture the emotions, thoughts, and experiences; to emerge with new understanding; to widen the context of issues; to recognize the strength of individuals within organizations; and to challenge prevailing hierarchies through committed leadership, courage, and persistence.
The research used multiple methods to gather data, focus the action cycles, and analyze the results (Cunningham, 1993; Patton, 1990; and Watkins & Marsick, 1993). A multi-needs assessment questionnaire (appendix D) and a training needs survey (appendix E) were used to gather data in the consulting cycle. Observation, focus groups, and individual interactions

provided data regarding implementation actions. A TNA value survey (appendix H) a year into implementation provided measures of validity, value, and use of the consulting deliverable, the training needs assessment.

Process

The action research involved a continuous spectrum of activities in research, planning, theorizing, learning, and feedback (Cunningham, 1993, 4). These activities occurred over an 18-month relationship of the researcher with people in the organization who were responsible for solving the problem. The action was highly dependent upon the researcher who was interactive first as a colleague, then as a consultant doing the training needs assessment (cycle one), and finally as a researcher using scientific methods of quantitative and qualitative research to analyze the dynamics of change through all three cycles. The research focused on the value of the training needs assessment, effects of the intervention process, and analysis of organization dynamics that affected the change process. Analyzing the case reveals the heart of the process from this researcher's perspective.

The resulting continuous process of research and learning was compared to change models (appendix B) and found to best fit Walter Shewhart's "Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle for Learning and Improvement" which was adapted as Total Quality Leadership (TQL) in the client organization during the 1980's (Shewhart, 1939; Deming, 1982; Wiechert, 1993). The research evolved through three Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycles. These cycles reflect major turning points of action within the organization: first, the training needs assessment; second, the leader's decisions to centralize training to solve their training problem; and third, actions to implement training needs assessment recommendations (appendix K),

Framework

The research framework ultimately used three different orientations. The first orientation was a training needs assessment of the systems hierarchy from individual to group to organization levels (Holton, 1995; Kirkpatrick, 1994; Office of Personnel Management, 1994). The second orientation was problem solving from the perspective of customers and organization leaders (Deming, 1982; Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). The third orientation was the researcher's viewfinding as colleague, consultant, and researcher from close-up and personal to long range possibilities.

Focusing the different orientations through a systems perspective combined the elements of political, structural, symbolic, and human relations frames of reference (Bolman & Deal, 1991). This multidimensional framework also helped provide empathic neutrality to the research process (Patton, 1990, 54). Triangulated data captured consciously and subliminally (Boucouvalas, 1990) were analyzed through multiple lenses and filters to improve accuracy, validity and reliability. For example, surveys done when the TNA was finished and again one year later were compared with interview and observational data to measure and validate views, values, and degrees of change. Journal notes over the course of the research added data for selective coding and assessments of roles, relationships, attitudes, knowledge, abilities, and skills (RAKAS) throughout the research. A positive human resource bias and an extraverted, sensing, feeling, judging preference were noted in the analysis requiring conscious intuitive thinking (critical reflection) to help balance interpretations. These philosophical predispositions are reflected in this writing.

Findings from the Research Questions

Three viewpoints answer the revised research questions: first, how the organization leaders value and use of the training needs assessment; second, an analytical view of effects of the consulting and research intervention in terms of change; and third, the researcher’s reflection on the individual and organizational dynamics that facilitate of inhibit planned changes. Action learning summarizes the most meaningful findings from the research. These viewpoints reveal a philosophical process consulting orientation to prioritize the clients needs first, evaluate effects of the consulting to meet the clients needs second, and finally, reflect on the lessons learned in the process.

View, Value and Use of the TNA

In answer to the first research question, the results of the research found the organization leaders did value, have used, and are incorporating the recommendations of the training needs assessment into their short and long term plans (TNA Value Survey, appendix H). However, this outcome did not occur as quickly, as easily, nor in ways expected as evident in the timelines (appendix J) and action cycles (appendix K). For example, the research extended a year beyond the original plan and changed emphasis from consulting to research after the first cycle.

The senior leaders developed a plan for implementing findings and recommendations from the training needs assessment by deciding to centralize the organizations training and create a directors position to manage the process. They briefed their plan to the organization's top leader who approved the reorganization and authorized funding to make it happen. When the new director of training arrived, he reviewed the TNA, prioritized its recommendations relative to conditions as he perceived them and proceeded to implement his plan.

These actions indicate that the senior leaders valued the TNA. One could ask whether they might have eventually taken these actions without the benefit of the TNA. Feedback about initial value of the TNA suggest the answer is "not likely". Interviews with the senior decision makers found that the TNA helped them to understand the magnitude of their situation—that more experienced people were needed to support their needs. A TNA value survey one year later found even greater value and utility of the TNA to the organization leaders (appendix I).

Effects of the Consulting Intervention

The second research question "What happens when the consultant intervenes...?" found time, timing, and criticality of the training problem slowed change. Communication challenges and a cultural bias about training that significantly affected implementation of the TNA recommendations. Many recommendations are only partially implemented and appear vulnerable to other systemic organizational problems such as budget cuts, personnel losses, and higher priority actions. This vulnerability relates to the finding that training is said to be important to the organization, but is a low priority for action and difficult to defend since there are no established measures of effectiveness linking training to the organization mission. For example, the organization leaders invested in a training needs assessment from which they expressed intent to take immediate action. But it was several months after delivery of the assessment before decisions were made for actions to actually begin. This trend of training as a low priority was evident in delayed reactions to the training needs assessment, in decision delays to prioritize the recommended actions, in reluctance to initiate training process improvements by individuals, and finally, in limited resourcing to support their chosen actions. Paradoxically, this low priority increased the difficulty of scheduling discussions to improve training. Despite these patterns, however, change is happening.

Organization Dynamics

Question three focused on organization dynamics that facilitated or inhibited the planned changes to improve training. Understanding the dynamics comes from interpreting the actions (appendix k), through characteristics identified in the organization change model such as what is evident above the water line, and what lies below (appendix L), and the researchers roles, attitudes, knowledge, ability, and skills (RAKAS, appendix F) and roller coaster of leaning (appendix J-D).

The models included measures such as time (also a critical resource), preferences such as the researchers extraverted sensing feeling judging personality (Myers, 1980), and group dynamics such as forming-storming-norming-performing-adjourning (Tuckman, 1965). Less evident and inferred findings were the dilemmas of single loop learning (Argyris, 1986) and dynamic conservatism (Schon, 1971) which help explain the dilemma of organization leaders saying training was important yet not supporting recommended training improvements more promptly or fully. The most interesting findings from analyzing the dynamics were the dilemmas, paradigms, and paradoxes clarified in the last cycle of the research, the action learning conclusions in this chapter.

Action Learning Conclusions

Coming to understand that action research is not a natural intellectual process as the name implies occurred as this research moved from actions helping the organization to action researcher learning. Describing action research holistically, for example, required identifying different parts of the process that have frequently been segregated into particular fields of study such as organization development, total quality leadership, or even adult education. Seeing the forest (action research) after identifying various trees and branches was revealing. Modeling helped capture the experience as a dynamic ever-changing process which requires energy, patience and endurance.

My intent in writing the results of the research is to share the learning experience; the outcome of snapshooting which Weisbord describes as a “process of turning anxiety into creative energy and mobilizing support for constructive action taking” (Weisbord, 1987, 257). The writing helped me realize what could be learned and is a way to help others.

Revelations of what I realized through action learning (Revans, 1982) came from critical analysis of the whole research process. These revelations reflect five philosophical disciplines adapted from Senge and others (1994, 6-7) that I envisioned to help this organization toward becoming a learning organization: personal mastery about learning organizations; mental modeling of the organization's training and change process; shared visioning to help transition the organization; team learning toward improving processes; and systems thinking to transform operations.

Personal Mastery

Personal mastery comes first to continually assess and improve what I myself have control over. A transformed perspective evolved as I reassessed why evaluation at three levels was important. Other researchers said the individual, group, and organization levels were important (Holton, 1995; Sleezer, 1992; Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). But why?

Answering this questions during the research led me to realize that only individuals can change and that consultants really only influence others who then influence groups within organizations. From that standpoint I suggest future action research focus more on researchers relationships to influence individuals in the context of groups within organizations to fully analyze change processes. For example, I found individuals must be willing to change their own thinking and feelings about the importance of training in this organization before real change could occur. Statements of intended changes were different from eventual actions. There was also the issue of blame and responsibility. Midway through this research I was lamenting about inaction blaming the organization and myself for the way things were going (as if I could have changed anything or anyone other than myself). This natural tendency consumed (wasted?) time and energy and was self defeating—certainly not the kind of thinking that would help. I needed to listen empathically, but neutrally, then provide advice to help organization leaders whose lamentations about their limitations contributed to the angst. Asking why? why? why? helped discover individual and cultural biases that put training as a lower priority and helped identify how some leaders needed to become proactive to influence getting training needs addressed and resourced.

As time passed and I realized implementation delays had less to do with the TNA and the consulting and more to do with individuals influencing the organization's culture, I reframed my approach from “How are things going?” to more specific questions about implementation progress to generate positive conversations. Some issues which I sensed had been undiscussible, surfaced for analysis. Instead of focusing on who is responsible, I began searching for how the system contributed to what was happening and probed for why?, reminding myself to keep asking “Why?” to get to root causes of problems such as the delayed training actions. Most important, I refocused on the desired results rather than problem-solving. I refocused on the vision of the bullet train to overcome the agony of roller coaster experiences.

Through critical reflection I remembered having started the consulting intervention with a more optimistic future perspective and realized how easily I had succumbed, fixating on events as an outcome of problem solving. Return to a future perspective created optimism and enthusiasm rather than generate doubt, worry, and blame that may have resulted unconsciously from uncertainty and inaction. The overall objective changed to create a more open system in my research process.

To improve personal mastery in practice I integrated wisdom from different disciplines into a change agent taxonomy tool. The taxonomy hierarchy starts with roles and relationships rather than knowledge, reflecting emphasis on process over things. Then add a persistent, positive attitude before combining with the traditional knowledge, abilities, and skills (RAKAS, appendix F). Most useful in the taxonomy is a hierarchy of change (synonymous with levels of learning) as a way to encourage double-loop learning—another way to refine consulting interventions for improved outcomes. My levels of learning are represented in appendix J-C as a traditional stair-step progression though they were in fact very chaordic.
In this case, the complexities of the situation and my desire to push toward a learning organization necessitated frequent networking with other professionals to competently respond to the changing dynamics. I was continually analyzing the process and adding relevant resources to guide the actions.

Modeling

Modeling throughout the process helped reduce anxiety, frustration, and uncertainty, though it did not eliminate those feelings. Modeling provided frames of reference to understand the systems interaction and positively assess progress toward change, particularly given the various delays and dilemmas. Modeling also provided a way to understand and respect individuals differing viewpoints. For example, leaders valuation before and after the TNA revealed unexpected changes in the outlooks expressed in the TNA Value Matrix (appendix I). Experiencing the change process with them deepened my appreciation for the challenges of leading a large organization through complex change.

Helping organization leaders develop their own models was done through the TNA, through regular visits to dialogue about implementation plans and process, and through shared insights. Continuous dialogue helped integrate training into their strategic visioning, though difficult to actually implement, as evident from delays and difficulties to centralize training. The danger was stretching thinking to a systems perspective but not presenting too many models while they were still creating their vision. At those points honest expression of feelings was paramount. Candid disagreement became valued as an important sign of trust in communications and relationships, especially when action stalled after the first problem-solving cycle.

In subsequent cycles, attitude assessments became opportunities for channeling energy toward future visions rather than problem-solving. Channeling helped focus on what was working and worthwhile rather than wasting energy lamenting about limitations. Not that there were not lamentations during this research. Only that critical reflection helped put things in a more positive learning perspective.

Two useful models found late in this reflection period were particularly helpful. Savage's Knowledging model (know-how, know-who, know-why, know-when, know-what, and know-where) (1996, 267), served as a simple memory link to my more comprehensive RAKAS model to help me keep things in perspective particularly in periods of inaction and uncertainty. Watkins's & Marsick's model from *Sculpting Learning Organizations* (1993, 37) also related to RAKAS and reminded me change would be a slow process chipping away of hierarchical thinking—but that I had choices in what I was doing relative to what I could do (focus), can do (capability) and want to do (will). In this case, I have become committed to doing more collaborative research and plan to continue networking to nurture the seeds planted with individuals in this organization.

Shared visioning

The consulting started through renewed collegial relationships to understand the leader's visions, first of their views on the training problem, then their views and expectations for the future. Commitment to contract and help them clarify and communicate that vision among themselves and to others in the organization through improved training became part of the TNA. The finding that few individuals knew or could find the organization mission, vision, and guiding principles made the TNA an opportune vehicle to share that knowledge. The organization mission, vision and guiding principles were imbedded at the beginning of the TNA to remind people of what the their work supported and what the recommended changes aimed to improve. A year later, after the senior leader left, the organization vision was readily available for review and subsequent revision under the new leader. The shared visioning helped improve relationships and build commitment to genuinely improve the training processes—our common goal. Sensitivity to the leaders differing goals and changing visions became important at times when advice and help was not welcome even when well intended. Here, not to be deceived by resistance was important. I had to remind myself of Weisbord's finding that defensive behavior and resistance is natural in the change process and very likely an indicator of where more help is most needed (Weisbord, 1987 and 1995). In such instances, focusing on the vision and common principles was a way to generate candid discussion and reduce the tendency to lay blame or become defensive about why things were or were not working.

Action aids suggested by Kirkhart & White (1985) helped overcome resistance and improve the interventions by pointing out the difference of activity monitoring (i.e., progress implementing TNA recommendations toward a common vision) and end-result evaluation (improved training however it was measured). In change processes Kirkhart and White suggested emphasizing activity monitoring but I found the need to balance monitoring with helping the clients determine end-results measures which would link training to their strategic plans while improving processes. Their desire for immediate results had to be addressed,

Patience in the process was a necessity along with analyzing where organization leaders were coming from with their goals. Discussions with organization leaders about their goals and changing priorities helped me avoid some pitfalls. Developing patience to not push for immediate action was one potential pit. At several points inaction seemed a better than jumping into action that could result in do-loops and delusions of improvements. A closely related pitfall was the human tendency to be judgmental. Paradoxically, the TNA may have camouflaged this pit in the way it was used: i.e., the TNA was used to rationalize restructuring which essentially slowed process improvements needed for real transformational change. I am still digging out of this pit—inquiring "Why?" while recognizing and respecting other factors the leaders had to evaluate in their decisions. I hope to fill in this rational but judgemental pit with insights from this critical reflection and further research.

Teamwork

Teamwork was a natural and necessary part of the process, was unobtrusive, more durable, and took less energy than trying to engage individually within the system. Identifying and working with the right team members (i.e., those transitioning to Memphis with expertise such as the new training director) is a TNA improvement still being addressed within the organization. As new members join the training team a planning board for training is being planned to augment the Workforce Transition Team. A teamwork approach is planned to help the team get beyond organizational structures and boundaries to real training program process improvement. Meanwhile the loyal but weary team members remaining behind are continuing to transition their training functions toward a centralized training system.

Systems Thinking

In this case refocusing from problem solving to a desired future state and working backward was helpful to overcome resistance, develop energy, enthusiasm, optimism, and high commitment (Lindaman, and Lippitt, 1979 in Weisbord, 1987, 283). Regrettably, refocusing was not fully realized until the last cycle of the action research, i.e., the first cycle was the traditional problem-solving method requested by the client and most commonly used in process consulting. When the TNA "solution" to the problem resulted in delayed actions (and fear of aborted research), alternative approaches were imperative. As the need for training became more critical, systems oriented solutions became more readily accepted by organization leaders.

Realizing the need for alternate approaches during the second action cycle reminded me of Patton's observation that too much research was based on habit instead of being responsive to situational opportunities (Patton, 1990, 39). My habit had become focused on the clients needs while reserving opinions about consequences of inaction which limited learning. Concern for their decision to centralize training was another dilemma, which, though discussed, did not necessarily generate the double-loop learning desired from candid assessment. I succumbed to habits of single-loop learning by doing what the leaders wanted and by following recommended action research steps rather than risk challenging that thinking more proactively. One such challenge was changing from a problem-solving approach to a futures perspective.

Upon further reflection, the importance of J. B. Cunningham's words about research goals came to mind. He said that research goals needed to be flexible, not long term, and revisited at each step to insure what was being done was important to the group, feasible, and justifiable (Cunningham, 1993, 71-72). By cycle three when the new training director arrived goals were carefully reviewed—and reflected significantly enlightened leadership views that allowed a more positive futures perspective. Some learning had occurred from the consulting process.

Cunningham's guidance that goals need to be flexible, short-term, and revisited were useful criteria for reflecting on the process as well as assessing the value of the TNA. When the organization leader's affirmed their value of the TNA by finally putting recommendations into action, however more slowly than initially planned, I was relieved, though still unsure of future actions. Long-term strategic vision helps ease the uncertainty of short term inactions.

Critical Reflection

The case study provides insight into the complexity of combining practice and research. Argyris & Schön (1996, 43) call the combination a "practitioner/researcher collaboration" implying that the two are not often done by the same person. After collaborating with myself on this process for nearly two years, I appreciate why action research is more often done through groups, academic institutions, the National Training Laboratories, or corporate firms. The need for networking, continuous learning and outreach to specialists is instrumental in dealing with such complex change. The research involves rational problem-solving and transformational learning.

Coming to understand that action research is not a natural intellectual process as the name implies occurred as this research moved from actions helping the organization to action researcher learning. Describing action research holistically, for example, required identifying different parts of the process that have frequently been segregated into particular fields of study such as organization development, total quality leadership, or even adult education. Seeing the forest (action research) after identifying various trees and branches was revealing.

Modeling helped capture the experience as a dynamic ever-changing process which requires energy, patience and endurance.

Rational Problem-Solving

This dissertation provides a rational discussion of a complex training needs assessment case study as an action research intervention and a qualitative perspective of disciplines used in the research process. The case study describes a systems perspective using mixed methods of data, design, and analysis integrating tools from multiple disciplines. Action learning of the case provides insightful understanding to the complex dynamics involved in process consulting and action research.

Reflection on various models lead to reassessment of the paradigms that bounded this research. The literature review was a useful start but paradoxically bound the methods I was practicing. I followed the processing consulting steps suggested by Block (1981) and Schein (1987), adhered to guidance on the training needs assessments (Holton, 1995), reflected on the nature of change by theorists and practitioners from education, management, and the social sciences, and adapted numerous models to this situation combining what enhanced my practice and fit my perspective. But more was needed.

Dilemma

The dilemma I finally recognized was the dilemma of methodological orthodoxy in the tendency to think dichotomously. On one hand I was trying to do action research as problem solving. On the other hand I was trying to create a more positive perspective. When I learned the opposite of action research was appreciative inquiry (McLean, 1996, 3), I realized the need to balance my practice with both problem-solving for the client and appreciative inquiry to create future possibilities. I was trying to maintain a positive perspective within the organization. But I was confounded with what was supposed to action research as I also confronted continuous delays, inaction, and rationalized reasons. A combined approach, however unorthodox, was a way to balance the reality of this research situation with competing methods, thereby, circumventing some of the research arguments remembered in the literature review. When in doubt, do what you feel is right and learn in the process.

Reflection-on-Reflections of a Researcher

Learning new ways of seeing, knowing, and doing has improved my viewpoints literally and figuratively: wide-angle systems views, long-range views, close-up and personal, magnifying what is discernible, sensing data not previously evident; detecting muting; looking for missing data; and interpreting actions. My practice improved as I ventured to attach multiple lenses to an action research camera. The different lenses revealed new dimensions of human dynamics at the risk of rambling research. Exploring the kaleidoscope of viewpoints helped me practice using different filters, choosing some with deliberation such as a positive, future perspective while at times trading off candid confrontation in diplomatic but shortsighted options.

There is also the continual challenge of double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1997, 21); i.e., candidly "reflecting-on-reflecting-in-action" is a continual process (Wiswell, 1991, 6). This is a process Habermas, Mezirow and others call critical reflection that may lead to transformational learning (Mezirow, 1991). Ironically, independent consulting in this case may have allowed more critical reflection than had I aligned with a firm, as time to reflect is not often done in business operations (Argyris & Schön, 1997). Such reflective learning is time consuming, risky in that it may undermine credibility, is costly, and unless requested by the contract, seldom afforded. The result is lost learning.

Paradoxes

Learning is a paradox throughout the process of this action research. The paradox of a learning situation arises as Jarvis says, "when action cannot be performed unthinkingly" (Jarvis, 1992, 85). Just when I and others thought we knew what to do, new insights or incidents seem to change the perspective. The TNA, for example, was a promising solution to improve training, yet, resulted in slowed planned change. The paradox goes back to the constant nature of change. Organizations can no longer be viewed as "frozen" like Lewin's change model suggests. We need to recognize the energy characteristically flowing continuously through people in the processes.

The organizational change model adapted to this case provides a more holistic framework for the type change evident in this organization (appendix L). The iceberg and waterline represent the concepts of force field analysis and integrate internal and external energy forces affecting the change process. The rational TNA recommended solutions in this case are only the tip of the iceberg: e.g..., the way the TNA was used to justify centralization, but not fully accomplish the change indicates issues and dynamics below the water line; the undiscussibles; the cultural biases about training as a low priority; the dilemma of not yet engaging workers with individual development plans or in a planning board for training.

Major energy sources are identified, channeled, and easily recognized in various fields—things we often take for granted. In this case they are organizational relationships and power plays facilitating and inhibiting consolidated training budgets and staff in a central location with local access networks.

Jarvis further explains the greatest paradox is that knowledge and behavior are often taken for granted (1992, 4). In fact, much was optimistically taken for granted when I began the consulting, such as the leaders readiness and willingness to change. By the research proposal stage the perspective enlarged with potential actions being given considerable thought to help facilitate TNA implementation. But the misassumptions about readiness to change was a compounding factor. Subsequent actions and inactions generated emotions from jubilation to exasperation; several months at a seeming standstill, but generally moving positively toward improved training with deeper learning about why things were the way they were. By the conclusion of the research, actions, inactions, and interactions related to the case had been given inordinate, sometimes excruciating, thought. Coding and analyzing the inactions revealed inordinate dialogue on problems and bemoaning about delays. Later refocusing on actions supporting long term goals created energy offsetting short term delays.

The greatest paradox may be realizing another reason action research is seldom reported—it is difficult to write and to defend as typical research. Action research is intended to help groups and organizations solve problems. Describing the myriad of interactions in the process and analyzing seemingly significant actions in the process by looking at the researcher moves into the realm of action learning, a different type of research. Superimposing the two understandably becomes somewhat confounding.

Trying to report this case in traditional case study format involved different approaches and styles that raised a lot of questions: i.e. how much detail and how to present the feelings, thoughts, experiences often missing in research (respecting sensors what to know more than intuitives)? what are the findings (in addition to helping the organization solve their training problem)? and what is significant to contribute to the fields of study? As you may have discerned, six chapters helped provide more detail of the whole story. Analysis of the research questions and the action learning led to findings meaningful to the researcher and this organization which may become generalizable as more research like this is reviewed.

Paradigms

A key learning point from this research is recognizing the growing need to expand the paradigms of research, training, and work. Individual research on learning and performance will help improve practice and process. Helping improve hierarchical systems facing future complex change such as this organization requires expanding organization's learning and performance paradigms. Redefining and operationalizing learning as part of work in a continuous, dynamic flow is one way suggested by Senge & others (1994). That is tough for budding consultants and unpublished researchers pushing the paradigms. But this research suggests the need to stretch beyond the traditional paradigms to get beyond problem solving to systems diagnosis and real strategic vision.

As with the need for research/practitioner collaboration in action research, there is a need for collaboration with performance technologists. In this case, for example, a generalist perspective helped to integrate processes with the help of graphics specialists using computer technologies to design mental models, e.g., the change model, action research cycle diagrams, and other qualitative tools evident in the appendices. Likewise, formatting and converting this document from PageMaker program to Word with global files for Electronic Transmission Dissertations (ETD) was only possible through collaboration with ETD computer technology experts.

The effort invested in collaborating with these technology experts was immense and disproved the myth that this type of work has become easy. It may seem easy for those who are experts and may not even realize their advantage, assuming others know what they know. Using more computer technologies and integrating models and improving tools became a quest in this research to learn what is involved in these processes as well as to leverage the technologies to improve consulting services and the knowledge to be shared.

This research report helps capture the dynamics and expand training and development paradigms. Collaboration with performance technologists combined analytical skills with knowledge solutions expertly—to be more future oriented than problem centered, as intended in this federal organization's training and education program. This combination of professional talents comes through networking with other interventionists. Such networking is invaluable to help individuals and organizations meet increasingly complex needs.

Transformational Learning

In retrospect, I have come to realize that my reflections went deeper than expected. Thinking back over a twenty-six years association with the organization from a variety of positions revealed changes in the organization's history, culture, values, and heritage that had deeper meaning in unexpected ways. Reflection on the meaning of this extended relationship revealed a subliminal commitment and loyalty to the organization, combined with a timely opportunity to help. The research helped me realize that I prefer this kind of organization for my consulting practice. They have the greatest need with which I can personally identify.

The research process became a continuous inner journey from the present back to the past then forward with dreams for the future through dialogue with myself and others as the research unfolded. Learning and knowing through the whole being included the soul and heart of what motivated me beyond the contract to consult and write this dissertation. The inner journey involved using all four of my Jungian functions (Myers, 1980): introverted sensing to gather all the details I could and then think about what these meant to me and others in the organization; extraverted feeling through continuous interactions with members of the organization long after the research had ended—a story with no end; and now extraverted intuition and writing what this seems to mean; open to the process but challenged by the uncertainties of worthiness of these reflections as research—so unconventional and open; fearing to put these reflections on paper, yet, in doing so, gaining a sense of deeper understanding; and learning through the generation of ideas and generalization of ideas across boundaries (Myers, 1980).

Trying to focus on learning, not training, as a way of helping the organization leaders' improve training was affirming—something that I work to make part of a daily routine through restructuring work to foster learning—especially how to help others continually improve themselves and their systems rather than waiting for directed change. I work to help leaders reduce anxiety by moving away from solving problems to create futures; from relying on experts to helping each other learn; from creating task forces to involving everybody; from finding the techniques to finding and valuing purpose; from doing it all now to doing what is doable within reason; from the routine to understanding the complex; from sequential, linear thinking to parallel, iterative activities; from managing structure, control, authority, and communications to learning; from industrial era principles to knowledge era networks through open systems, empowerment, and honest, candid dialogue across boundaries. (Nirenberg, 1997; Spady & Bell, 1996; Weisbord, 1987, 279). This case study reveal a transformation of some elements of my practice to shape a personal philosophy of process consulting—helping where I can.

<u>Caught Between Paradigms</u>

As I conclude writing about this research I found myself caught between paradigms—wanting to lead change into the information era with deeper insights but anchored to conservatism of organizations bound in the industrial era and uncertain about flexibility and openness for naturalistic inquiry, mindful of forces fueling my opportunities for practice and evaluating my efforts. Practicing what I believe requires expressing things I feel deeply committed to maintaining as my philosophy of process consulting:

- Involve everybody to help each other learn;
- Advocate quality and customer service—a valued purpose;
- Know who is the customer and what type of customer;
- Hold interactive stakeholder meetings to reach across organizational lines;
- Balance structure, content, and process in future visioning;
- Listen, to oneself and others, and acknowledge feelings;
- Challenge traditional thinking to become more systems oriented;
- Be holistic involving the mind, body, and spirit without sacrificing oneself;
- Share information but let go of needing to share everything;
- Help others develop their learning—to write their own stories;
- Be open to change and resistance as wholesome, natural, and healthy growth processes;
- Make notes and review them...regularly;
- Seek to reduce anxiety (my own and others);
- Follow up; and

- Remember “People don’t care as much about who you are, who you know, or what you know, **but that you care**”. (Dr. John Ed Mathison, UMC Sermon, Montgomery, AL, 1988.

This eclectic list reflects the influence and perspective of practitioners and academicians whose recent writings serve as a guide for improving ways to practice now and in the future (Nirenberg (1997), Senge (1991), Spady & Bell (1996), Weisbord (1987, 279, 351, & 371). The list serves as a reminder and reference to continually assess my roles/responsibilities, attitudes/choices, knowledging/learning, abilities and skills (RAKAS). The ultimate result and benefit is a continuous process of learning, identifying, and pushing to improve action research frames of reference.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research lead back to the PDCA cycle for continuous improvement—a review of the research. The TNA is a useful case study modeling a practitioner/researcher collaboration. Networks were developed with those committed to improving the organization’s training. In the process I developed a list of issues to be further researched, especially things I could not yet scientifically prove. Upon closer review the issues now seem minor, even mundane compared to the holistic nature of the case. But I write them to remind myself of things to consider in the future; to possibly pursue; things that might have been doable had I known then what I know now. The list will be helpful in future research design.

- Explore effects of cultural changes such as the new training director’s adjustment to the organization’s situation and the transitions.
- Seek a clearer understanding of senior leader’s views and vision over time—especially how it affects their perspectives and decision making in the short term.
- Figure out how to forecast and minimize resistance to change and help people through the experience, especially those who say they want the very change they are resisting.
- Seek deeper insights to personal blind spots, such as the dilemma of dichotomous thinking and single loop learning.
- Further analyze why some directed change failed in this organization, e.g. ,the systems links to outside agencies where new hires where discouraged from attending orientation training.

- Continue exploring the Multi-attribute Utility (MAUT) evaluation method once value streams are identified by leaders transitioning with the organization to look in more detail at what training they do value and why (Posavac & Carey, 1985).
- Continue individual and group type assessments (McAleer, 1988).

I recommend and look forward to networking with others interested in practice and holistic research of this type. My goal is to simply share and continuously develop this experience through whatever opportunities are available; through shared visions, in groups such as those I worked with in the organization and with leaders to encourage their creation of systems that store and share data for information and knowledge development; to help restructure training to support organizational and individual learning by creating systems that promote and reward knowledge sharing; to continue to identify and develop the critical skills, tools, and roles required of “knowledge leaders”; to continue to nurture and tap under-utilized knowledge workers within the organization.

This case study documents one way of transforming action research and consulting practice paradigms; of finding new ways to slip the bounds of traditional research to emerge with new understanding, to widen the context of issues; to recognize the strength within organizations; to capture the wisdom of the ways; to challenge prevailing hierarchies through committed leadership, courage, and persistence (Stubblefield & Keane, 1988, 27-36).

From this action research experience I know the need for similar work. Many are engaged in similar processes but few are likely talk candidly about them or publish the results unless there is a call for people to reveal more: to express what really goes on, not just rely on more limited reports. Until then, new consultants may naively enter practice well grounded in theory but doomed to run into indiscussible paradoxes of practice. I know I did until sufficiently challenged to search beneath the surface to critically reflect on the system and processes. With professional networks of mentoring educators and practitioners, professional development can become synergized and less compartmentalized—adult learning at work—sharing techniques and tools that expand models for practice, candidly discussing processes from a systems perspective, regardless of what gets published. Publishing this case study will add to the literature on the challenges of doing more systematic training needs assessments. Documentation about the dynamics of complex change in a large government organization may be generalizable to other organizations: i.e., become more publicly discussable for double-loop learning.

Finally, we return to the meaning to Schein's "philosophy of maintaining a process consultation orientation" (1987, 205). This case study reveals that regardless of what we espouse to be our philosophy, it is what we do through practice that is measured and developed: validating the need to continuously learn; to tap wisdom of the sages over time, putting knowledge into context; to integrate linear learning (i.e. timelines through the waves of change); to make knowledge visible, more accessible; to surface indiscussible issues and candidly dialogue with others who can shed light, recall things known but not shared (limits of time, money, publishers); to give voice to more people, and to project into the future.

Postscript

The main contribution that is new from this case study is the candid, holistic, systematic, description of this action research. This includes insights to feelings, thoughts, and experiences seldom reported in research (Bolman & Deal, 1997). Few of the findings are new; not even the challenge of existing paradigms. This research merely reports and reflects a holistic way of integrating, practicing, and improving what others have suggested.

This case study is also significant because it considers perspectives from multiple disciplines using a systems perspective to understand complex processes over time. The contributions of this work will vary with perspectives of the readers, much like the researcher's feelings, thoughts, experiences, and learning varied like a kaleidoscope with different frames of reference. Each reading generates deeper reflection transforming our perspectives (Mezirow, 1981).

Most important, the action research is helping a large government organization improve their training which was the primary purpose of this work. May you all find value in reflecting on what you read.