Chapter 3

# The Use of Soft Systems Methodology for Change Management

## ABSTRACT

*Due to the gap in our knowledge of soft systems methodology (SMS) and organizational change management, this chapter seeks to develop new knowledge that explains the use of SMS as an intervention measure in optimizing change. Using SSM, leaders are able to see the big picture, consequences of their measures in a larger environment, and provide effective, long-term, and sustainable solutions. Here are some case studies on subjects related to issues of stakeholder selection and management, communication assumptions in SSM, the facilitator's ambiguous role, and the impact of highly politicized problem environments on the methodology effectiveness in the change process.*

## INTRODUCTION

Today, we are confronted with an environment characterized by constant change along with the growing relevance of the elements contained therein (Robbins, 1990). The nature of change in today's world is more revolutionary, not evolutionary. Regardless of the impact of interventions and changes on the larger system in which they work, leaders often anticipate success in their team or department, and thus their desired change may not be sufficiently effective. Conversely, successful leaders utilize a systems approach to see

the business or organization as a complete system, and thus can even see the impact of small activities, interventions or changes in one sector on that sector and on the whole organization. The systematic approach is based on two principles. Firstly, no single thing can change without affecting every part of the system to which it belongs. Secondly, change in any part of a system affects every other part (Javidi, 2003).

Similar to living systems, organizations also experience a variety of gradual and incremental changes during stages corresponding to growth, maturity and decline stages (Miller, 1978). Furthermore, organizations experience some kind of oscillatory change due to the feedback mechanisms to achieve a steady state or homeostasis (Bertalanffy, 1973; Skyttner, 2001). However, in case that the environmental changes exceed the permitted level achievable by homeostatic mechanisms, the organization as a system must adapt itself to a new form fitted with a new environment. Therefore, one can expect some dramatic change here (Leifer, 1989).

Leaders have the opportunity to see the bigger picture and adjust to the underlying trends, patterns, and consequences of actions in the larger environment using a systematic approach. Such an approach enables them to use systems integration and provide effective, sustainable and long-term solutions to them. Observing events or data, identifying behavioral patterns overtime, and display basic structures are often used in systems thinking to guide events and patterns. Understanding and changing structures, that are incompatible with the needs of the company, will facilitate the expansion of options and lead to more satisfactory and long-term solutions to problems.

This chapter seeks to create new awareness of the use of soft systems methodology (SSM) as an intervening measure to create optimal changes. In this regard, some case studies have been examined related to stakeholder selection and management, relationship assumptions in SSM, facilitator's ambiguous role, and the impact of highly political problem environments on the methodological effectiveness in the change process.

## ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

According to Rouse (2005), organizational transformation relates not only to changing practices, but also to fundamentally changing organizational relationships in one or more key areas, such as customers, employees, suppliers, and investors. Hence, new value propositions can be offered by transformation in terms of products and services, the way of delivering and supporting them,

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