

CREATIVE EDGE ORGANIZATIONS

Businesses and Organizations as a “Kind” of Focusing Community

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ABSTRACT

After thirty years involvement in starting Listening/Focusing Communities, I searched for present-day contexts where the Focusing Community model of the original Changes group (Chicago, 1969-1975) could “spread like wildfire.” I had a major “epiphany” when I realized that businesses/for-profit and non-profit organizations ARE communities. I began to articulate the model of Creative Edge Organizations, where each individual is engaged at their own Creative Edge, their unique “felt sensing,” while working alone and in groups/teams/meetings, and incorporated Intuitive Focusing and Focused Listening as core skills of the PRISMS/S Problem Solving Process. I also developed The Creative Edge Pyramid of seven applications for incorporating Listening/Focusing into the widest variety of situations at home and at work, a form of “human literacy.”

HOW SPREAD LISTENING/FOCUSING “LIKE WILDFIRE”?

In 2006, I came out of retirement to try to figure out how to spread Listening and Focusing, and particularly Focusing Communities, like “wildfire.” I had been involved with Listening/Focusing for over thirty years and yet, still, only a tiny fraction of human beings even knew of these wonderful self-help skills. In that time, the internet, website, blogs, and social networking sites had provided new opportunities for sharing ideas. I began looking at how to use these new avenues to try to get Listening/Focusing into the world — *as core skills of “human literacy”* — as basic and widespread as reading and writing.

Gendlin’s (1981, 1984) six-step Focusing process was developed in the context of the original Changes group in Chicago, (1969-1975). Focusing was taught hand-in-hand with Empathic Listening. Since founding The Focusing Institute in the mid 1970’s, Gendlin has gone on to develop Thinking At The Edge (TAE), the Philosophy of the Implicit, and The Process Model (see www.focusing.org homepage for an introduction to all of these). There has been less emphasis upon developing theory and practice in the area of Focusing Groups and Focusing Communities.

During those early days, I had done my dissertation, with Gendlin as adviser, on “Listening and Interruptions in Task-Oriented Meetings” (Boukydis a.k.a. McGuire, 1975; McGuire, 1977). I had wanted to find a way to stop aggressive, competitive interruptions in group meetings in order to create a Listening and Focusing climate. Problem solvers would have the time, space, and safety for Focusing — to stop quietly, check in with their “whole body sensing” of situations, and articulate new ideas and solutions directly from their present felt experiencing.

I hypothesized that non-interrupted speaking turns would allow workers to express their own needs, their own negative reactions or hesitations, their own creative ideas and also really hear the ideas of others. This increase in “collaborative thinking” would increase the quality of decisions by taking into account more aspects and also increase worker ownership of decisions and hence motivation to carry them out. I found support for these assumptions in decision-making literature (McGuire, 1977).

By 1981, I had self-published a manual, *Building Supportive Community: Mutual Self-Help Through Peer Counseling* (renamed *Focusing In Community: How To Start A Listening/Focusing Support Group* in 2005, and translated into Spanish by Agnes Rodriguez). I incorporated chapters, not just on Focusing Alone, Focusing Partnerships, and Focusing Groups, but also on Interpersonal Focusing for conflict resolution and Collaborative Decision Making for task-oriented meetings.

I had started six Focusing Communities, one each time I moved to a new location, each lasting five to ten years. Mako Hikasa (1999) started over twenty Focusing Groups as a regional, interconnected Focusing Community in Japan. And a number of Changes groups existed throughout the world, where they often sprang up as members of a Focusing Class or Workshop decided to continue on in this self-help context (Changes listing, 2008). But, except in Japan, there had been little spread of Focusing Groups or Communities in a concerted way.

It seemed to me that the world needed these methods for appreciation and respect for the needs and viewpoints of the other and for turning conflict into “empathy” and an attempt to find Win/Win solutions for everyone. So, I started brainstorming about “where are there communities today? Where would be the hotbeds for community building in today’s world?”

WATCHING OTHER IDEAS SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE

At the same time, I had watched (over thirty years) while many ideas and methods DID spread like wildfire, particularly in the world of business and organizational development: the concept of “emotional intelligence” and “social intelligence,” from Daniel Goleman’s books (1997, 2007), and EQ at work (Liberti, 2008); Total Quality Management (2008); FISH — Fresh Ideas Start Here (Lundin and Christensen, 2000); the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Myers, 1980); the Enneagram (Riso and Hudson, 1999); most recently, Malcolm Gladwell’s *Blink: Thinking Without Thinking* (2005), which legitimizes “intuition” as a valid method of decision making, a national “best seller.”

Since businesses and organizations seemed to have both motivation and funding for trying out many methods to increase creativity, innovation, and interpersonal effectiveness, I decided to concentrate my major energies on creating a user-friendly version of Listening/Focusing that might “spread like wildfire” through businesses and organizations.

I spent many hours brainstorming with a variety of people in business and organizational settings, and built in the assumption that Listening/Focusing skills learned at work could be carried over into family and community life, giving businesses a double bonus

for their investment. Stress at home contributes greatly to absenteeism and inefficiency at work.

BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS ARE COMMUNITIES

Doing my own Thinking At The Edge (TAE) process, I realized that businesses and organizations ARE communities. By their nature, coworkers are “trapped” in a face-to-face, interdependent situation, which they cannot leave.

SOME ABSOLUTE ESSENTIALS FOR WORKERS

- Learning to work out their interpersonal conflicts
- Having a successful model for making and implementing group decisions
- Having a model for creative, innovative thinking and problem solving and for communication between themselves and their clients
- For co-workers: the ability to work in teams, tolerate their diversity, and make the most of their “differing gifts”

Businesses cannot afford the constant turnover and need for retraining that comes from irresolvable conflicts.

The model I developed for Focusing Communities, articulated in the *Focusing in Community* manual (1981, 2007), included all of these things: not just Focusing Alone for creative problem solving, but also Focusing Partnerships in the context of Focusing Groups or Teams, Interpersonal Focusing for resolving conflicts, and Collaborative Focusing-Oriented Decision Making for task-oriented groups. Here was a “package” of skills and methods that could be brought into businesses and organizations.

At about this time, I gathered up some books at a kiosk at the Northwest Regional Airport near Bentonville, Arkansas — home of mega-business giant WalMart. Everyone who is a vendor for WalMart passes through that airport, so it seemed to me that the books sold there would be cutting edge.

One was *U R A Brand!: How Smart People Brand Themselves For Business Success* by Catherine Kaputa (2005). Walking through it on my plane trip, I did exercises that encouraged me to articulate my niche, my particular offering, to create ‘intellectual capital’ by naming my own innovative ideas, to create rubrics and mnemonics (easy-to-remember) that might ‘spread like wildfire.’

Creating my own ‘intellectual capital’, and hoping to ‘ride the coat tails’ of Gladwell’s success with bestseller *Blink* (2005) validating ‘intuition,’ I reframed the core skill Focusing as **Intuitive Focusing** (McGuire, 2007i). When my husband told me that business people saw ‘empathy’ as a form of weakness, loss of competitive edge, I reframed Empathic Listening as **Focused Listening** (McGuire, 2007f).

I created the mnemonic PRISMS/S Problem Solving Process (McGuire, 2007j), and the prism logo and symbolism throughout the website, for my core ‘product’ to market. I wanted something that could be presented to businesses as a Power Point Presentation. Combining the steps of Gendlin’s Focusing Process with the steps of personality change outlined in his article, “A Theory of Personality Change” (1964), I created:

- **Pausing** to ‘clear a space’ for problem identification
- **Reflection** by self (Inner Relationship) or other (Listening Partnership)
- **Intuitive Focusing** as the back-and-forth between symbols and felt meaning
- **Shifting** as the ‘felt shift,’ the Paradigm Shift bringing a new way of seeing
- **Movement** as the actual action steps that arise from the ‘felt shift’
- **Satisfaction** as the tension release and ‘sureness’ of the “Ahah!” experience
- **Support** as the bonus of community from Listening/Focusing in Partnerships

COLLABORATION = CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

In *Joy At Work: A Revolutionary Approach To Fun ON The Job*, Dennis W. Bakke (2005), CEO of a huge corporation, AES, worked to get rid of regulations and top-down management, believing that “when American workers are given freedom and responsibility, they are more productive, creative, loyal, and joyful” (Book jacket quoting U.S. Senator Don Nickles).

This attitude of ‘empowerment from the bottom up’ fit right in with the innovative work I had done in non-profit organizations, finding the ‘One Small Thing’ that everyone could be involved in. This ‘grass roots’ collaborative effort built ownership, motivation, and a sense of community. Businesses used words like ‘buy-in’ and ‘loyalty’ to describe this felt experience of ‘bonding’ to the organization or work group. Corporations really do want their workers to enjoy coming to work, enjoy their coworkers, and enjoy using their own best skills to create and actualize innovative ideas.

In *Toppling The Pyramids: Redefining The Way Companies Are Run*, Gerald Ross and Michael Kay (1994) described how, in order to be creative and innovative in today’s ever-shifting market, companies had to be:

- (a) immediately ‘in touch with’ and ‘listening to’ the needs of consumers
- (b) flexible enough to respond immediately to consumer needs with new products

Hierarchy and bureaucracy only stifled creativity and innovation. The old ‘assembly line’ model of the past must give way to flexible teamwork at the interface between consumers and employees.

Here was confirmation of everything I had been thinking about and working with for years in the Focusing Community model. For me, the purpose of Focusing has always

been self-empowerment. As Focusing allows a person to find out what they really want, to look below their surface ‘reactivity’ and take ownership and responsibility for their own felt meanings, Focusing empowers the person to go forward in the world and get what they need, enact their clear vision.

The June 19, 2006 edition of the national magazine, *Business Week*, had a special insert, a special new section on Innovation and Creativity as the new thrust in business. There, in a long article, Conlin (2006) reviewed their choice of ‘Ten Innovation Champions,’ people who had brought about mega-change in their businesses/organizations.

These people often occupied newly-created positions like ‘Vice President of Innovation’. And a majority of them, working in major corporations, were women! And what were they doing? Breaking down walls between cubicles, putting people together in cozy lounge-like settings for collaborative thinking and sharing, using FaceBook-like videos to bring workers closer together, to create community, by letting them get to know each other.

What was the acknowledged keynote of innovation and creativity? Collaboration, collaboration, collaboration: People working across departments, across disciplines, across the boundary between inside and outside the corporation, interacting with each other and consumers and outside experts, collaborating to create new ideas. Bottom-up motivation and egalitarian, collaborative thinking, a more ‘feminine’ model than top-down bureaucracy, were core to both creativity and motivation in businesses and organizations.

In the June 2, 2008, *Business Week*, there was another confirmation. The cover story by Baker and Green (2008), “Beyond Blogs: What Business Needs To Know,” showed that, in the three years since an earlier Cover Story on blogs as basic tools for businesses, emphasis had moved from blogs to “social media” like MySpace, FaceBook, Twitter, LinkedIn — interactive internet communities where consumers can interact directly with companies. Asked for his response, blogging-giant Jeff Jarvis, BuzzMachine, states:

“Next, I think, *Business Week*’s readers will see that social media are changing their fundamental relationship with customers to be less about serving and more about collaborating. No, I don’t mean that every product will be the product of a committee. But customers who want to talk will, and smart companies will not just listen but will engage them in decisions. This will have an impact not just on PR and image but on product design, marketing, sales, customer service — the whole company. Three years from now, I predict *Business Week*’s Cover won’t be about blogs or tools but about **companies as communities.**” (bolding, mine) (p.50).

Companies as communities! With Listening and Focusing skills at their center, businesses and organizations as a kind of Focusing Community!

CREATIVE EDGE ORGANIZATIONS: BASIC THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS

- Maximum motivation arises when people are encouraged to create their lives and solutions to problems from their own Creative Edge.
- When organizational structures lose touch with The Creative Edge of individuals, apathy is created.

- True change, at any level, from personal to global, happens by engaging **The Creative Edge** of individual human beings, Gendlin's 'felt sense.' There is no lasting way to impose change from the outside.
- Lasting change is empowered from the individual entering into collaborative action with other individuals (McGuire, 2007c).

The Core Skills of **Focused Listening** and **Intuitive Focusing** provide the basic method for individuals, alone, in pairs, or in groups, to access The Creative Edge, the 'intuitive feel' of thinking and experiencing from which totally new ideas and solutions can arise. They increase creativity and deepen communication and support in any volunteer organization or for-profit corporation.

The fast-paced, argumentative, competitive nature of much group decision making discussion makes it impossible for anyone to pay attention to and speak from The Creative Edge, the right-brain, 'intuitive feel' which can contain the newest, freshest, most innovative solutions. Given the energy expended on simply trying to interrupt and get a turn, participants cannot really listen to the contributions of others.

Instant "Ahah!" Collaborative Thinking (McGuire, 2007g) gives the simple "How To's" for groups which I discovered when I undertook research to describe the difference between aggressive, competitive, and *Listening/Focusing-oriented* meetings (Boukydis a.k.a. McGuire, 1975; McGuire, 1977).

The most creative solutions, either in individual or in group decision-making, arise when the individual or the group is able to sit with polarized oppositions and wait until a newly-created 'third way' can arise. We call this a 'win/win' decision: instead of a painful compromise where each side really gives up more than they are willing to, and, later, finds reasons not to carry out the decision, a 'win/win' decision, a much more effective option, really does contain enough aspects from both sides to produce satisfaction, and thus motivation.

Pure consensual decision making can be extremely time-consuming, since no action can be taken until every member agrees to go along with it. **The Collaborative Edge Decision Making (CEDM)** (2007b) application includes the use of Coordinated Collaboration as a method for brainstorming from the bottom/up without having decision-making bog down.

The Creative Edge Organization method, with **The One Small Thing component** continually breaks down projects to the level where as many individuals as possible can be actively involved in problem solving and decision-making from The Creative Edge and in carrying out projects. This method gives participants a feeling of "ownership" of the group's work and also the benefits to community building of working together on a joint goal.

Although top/down hierarchical structures can also be used for aspects of the work, *The One Small Thing* component works from the bottom/up to involve every person actively in action and decision-making where that is possible.

(See **Instant "Ahah!" Empowerment Organization** (2007h) for a Focusing exercise to find 'The One Small Thing').

THE CREATIVE EDGE PYRAMID: BASIC MODEL FOR INCORPORATING LISTENING/FOCUSING THROUGHOUT ORGANIZATIONS

The Creative Edge Pyramid (McGuire, 2007e), seven applications for using the core skills, Intuitive Focusing and Focused Listening, emphasizes that the same core skills can be used at home as well as at work. Stress at home causes great absenteeism and lack of productivity at the work place. Businesses need a two-edged sword, stress reduction at home and work, for increasing creativity and innovation.

Here is The Creative Edge Pyramid, utilizing the visual mnemonic of a ‘prism’:

Focusing Alone for Personal Growth
Focusing Partnership for Ongoing Creativity
Interpersonal Focusing for Conflict Resolution
Focusing Group/Team for Innovative Problem Solving
Collaborative Edge Decision Making for Win/Win Meetings
Focusing Community To Facilitate Diversity and Mutual Support
Creative Edge Organization To Motivate People From the Bottom Up

Any method can be used as free-standing, and all of them together add up to **Creative Edge Organizations**.

In approximately forty hours of training, Creative Edge Focusing Consultants teach everyone involved the PRISMS/S Problem Solving Process, with its two Core Skills, Intuitive Focusing and Focused Listening, and how to use PRISMS/S in the Creative Edge Pyramid of Applied Methods. Not limited only to business, students, parents, teachers, physicians, executives, managers, employees, or community members can acquire the “emotional intelligence” skills to:

- Create new ideas
- Change problem behaviors
- Listen to another
- Resolve interpersonal conflicts
- Start a support group
- Build supportive community
- Create innovative solutions
- Create win/win decisions in groups
- Motivate others for collaborative action

FROM INDIVIDUALS TO ORGANIZATIONS

The methods start with personal use of Intuitive Focusing and build to the integration of Intuitive Focusing and Focused Listening into interpersonal, group/team, community, and organizational interaction. Examples of each approach can be found under Case Studies (McGuire, 2007a) at www.cefocusing.com:

1. Focusing Alone (or with the help of a CE Focusing Consultant or Focusing Professional) for Personal Growth:

Intuitive Focusing allows individuals to pay attention to the Creative Edge, the ‘intuition’ or ‘hunch’ which contains the sense of ‘the whole thing’ and to articulate this sense into innovative ideas, artistic creations, and totally new actions, instant “Ahah!” experiences. Intuitive Focusing also allows individuals to pay attention to the Creative Edge under repetitive, ‘irrational,’ self-defeating or confusing behavior patterns and, out of this Creative Edge, to create new responses, experiencing Paradigm Shifts that lead to new behaviors.

In Focusing-Oriented Coaching, a Creative Edge Focusing Consultant or Certified Focusing Professional can help an individual learn and use Intuitive Focusing by providing Focused Listening responses and coaching in how to develop the Inner Listener and to use Focusing for problem resolution. The Focuser learns to recognize and deal with the voice of the Inner Critic, to turn a Caring Feeling Presence toward their inner experiencing, to resolve conflicts between different aspects of the Self, and to articulate gut intuitions’ into concrete ideas, solutions, and action steps.

2. Focusing Partnership For Ongoing Creativity

Through the Focusing Partnership method, Focused Listening by a partner helps an individual to use Intuitive Focusing to articulate new ideas and to change problem behaviors. A weekly meeting to exchange Listening/Focusing turns as equals, be it for creative ideas or emotional healing, allows partners to follow a theme of problem solving consistently.

In organizations, learning the Focused Listening skill in this peer counseling context also provides a seamless interface to Focused Listening with customers, clients, and consumers, uncovering true wants and needs which can be served by the organization. Whether friends, employees, or customers, people are more willing to listen to our perspective and cooperate with us when they first feel deeply understood.

3. Interpersonal Focusing for Conflict Resolution

The Interpersonal Focusing method provides a structure where people in a conflict can exchange Listening/Focusing turns. In interpersonal conflict situations, the Focused Listening skill makes a space for Intuitive Focusing, where individuals can tap into Gendlin’s ‘felt sense,’ The Creative Edge, in the middle of interacting with another person. While Focusing, each participant can come in touch with the Creative Edge, the deeper, ‘subconscious’ meanings driving the conflict. While Listening, each comes to understand and empathize with the Focuser. A third person can serve as a Listening Facilitator.

Through the Interpersonal Focusing method, Focused Listening allows individuals to understand each other, move out of polarized positions in decision making, and avoid disagreements based on mistaken assumptions, prejudice, and stereotyping. Misunderstanding is replaced with empathic understanding and respect for the unique perspective of the other. Interpersonal Focusing can be an important part of Diversity Training in organizations.

Whether conflicts are interpersonal, inter-group, national, or global, Interpersonal Focusing allows the creation of new understandings which lead to creative resolutions.

4. Focusing Group/Team for Creative Problem Solving

In the Focusing Group/Team method, participants come together to ‘check in’ on progress since the last meeting and to break into pairs or triads for the equal exchange of Listening/Focusing turns. For emotional healing, the Focusing Group provides ongoing support. For team support in a work environment, Creative Edge Focusing Teams generate feelings of collegiality and mutual support, rather than aggressive competition, and provide ongoing networking and support for creative problem solving.

The Focusing Group/Team method teaches every individual how to run a group meeting, whether for emotional or creative problem solving. Groups follow a simple format involving a timed ‘Check In’ by each person, a short time for Announcements/Business, then break out into Focusing Partnerships for the exchange of Listening/Focusing turns as peers, ending with a few minutes of “Closure,” anyone who chooses sharing what came up in their Focusing Turn.

Focusing Groups/Teams, since they involve equal time and attention to the needs of each participant, are a form of burn-out prevention, providing much needed ‘nurturing’ even in a business context.

5. Collaborative Edge Decision Making for Win/Win Meetings

The Collaborative Edge Decision Making Application (McGuire, 2007b), with its components of Shared Leadership, Coordinated Collaboration, and Creative Edge Impasse Resolution techniques, provides concrete methods for insuring the protected space needed for articulating new ideas and resolving conflicts at decision making meetings. Whether in group, community, organizational, or international decision making and conflict resolution situations, Intuitive Focusing within meetings allows participants to contribute new ideas from the Creative Edge, generating innovative solutions. Focused Listening moves polarizing conflicts to win/win solutions.

6. Focusing Community To Facilitate Diversity and Mutual Support

In The Focusing Community method, Focusing Groups/Teams go beyond exchanging Listening/Focusing turns and incorporate the Interpersonal Focusing and Creative Edge Decision Making Methods for conflict resolution and win-win decision making. Community, whether for emotional, social, or organizational purposes, involves individuals working together toward a common goal. Community depends upon being able to incorporate a

diversity of personalities, skills, and viewpoints and to make decisions that meet the needs of the whole group.

Conflict is inevitable and, seen as representing a Creative Edge of innovation, is part of the added creativity which comes through collaborative endeavor. The Focusing Community component, with Interpersonal Focusing for conflict resolution, can be a method of Diversity Training in organizations.

7. Creative Edge Organization To Motivate People From The Bottom Up

In the Creative Edge Organization method, Intuitive Focusing and Focused Listening norms protect and nurture intuition, creativity, and innovation at the personal, individual point of each participant's own internal passion and motivation. Apathy is the enemy of creativity. Motivation from the bottom up is ignited through Focusing Partnerships, Groups and Teams that engage each individual's Creative Edge. Experiences of empathy and community, as well as participation in collaborative decision making, create ownership, 'buy in,' loyalty, and commitment to future action.

CONCLUSION

In organizations, the exchange of Listening/Focusing turns creates ongoing support for innovative thinking and creative, collaborative problem solving. When PRISMS/S, with Intuitive Focusing and Focused Listening, is used in interpersonal, group, or organizational problem solving situations, win/win decisions are created out of polarized conflicts, and innovative thinking is unleashed.

The Empowerment Organization method of Creative Edge Organization uses PRISMS/S to discover the One Small Thing which will ignite action, ownership, and 'buy in' at every level in the organization. Whether in community building, volunteer organizations, corporations, or participatory democracy, motivation depends upon finding, as a first step, that 'one small thing' which each and every person is willing and able to do.

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