Tool: Future Search Conference

Meeting involving a large number of people from a variety of backgrounds who are concerned about the same issue. Participants express their opinions about the past, present, and future as well as take part in building a shared vision and developing an action plan involving the stakeholders.

**Uses**

- It can be used to discuss a variety of topics ranging from social issues (such as sustainable development, water quality, etc.) to organizational issues (such as balancing family and professional considerations, OHS values, organizational change, strategic planning, etc.).
- Tool promoting the stimulation of innovation, mobilization of the troops, and building of shared visions.

**OHS Use**

- Can be used for projects to improve OHS performance and to build a shared view of OHS.
- Can be used as a collaborative tool between the employer, the union, the government, etc.
- Can be used to identify OHS needs and to take stock of our OHS knowledge.

**Practical OHS Example**

Norske Canada, a pulp-and-paper company, has used the future search conference technique to explore their future vision of workplace safety. One hundred and twenty (120) people from different departments participated in the forum that took place in 2002. The two-day session was kicked off with a presentation by Dr. Stewart describing the OHS attributes of excellence. That was followed by workshops to enable the participants to express their vision of the future for workplace safety and its inherent values. They then compared their visions of the future with reality in order to identify any discrepancies. An action plan was developed and the 120 participants became champions for the new values and new vision.

**Benefits**

- Fosters dialogue and each participant expressing their views of reality, experiences, differences, needs, and vision.
- Encourages creativity and collaboration.
- Elicits greater commitment to the proposed actions.
- Makes it possible to build new relations, facilitate learning between participants, achieve consensus, and share the same values.

**Limitations**

- Demanding in terms of upstream organization (preparation) and requiring a significant investment in time.

**References and Resources**

Directions for Use: Future Search Conference

**Conditions**

- Each participant must take part in all the workshops and their opinions must be respected.
- Workshops must not take the shape of speeches or monologues. Participation and discussion must guide the conference workshops.
- The conference must be held far from all distractions.

**How It Works**

### Step 1: Preliminary planning
- Identify a problem
  - Decide to hold a future search conference
- Plan the conference:
  - Time and place
  - Participants
  - Program
  - Employees

### Step 2: Search conference
- Future Search Conference:
  - Workshops for sharing perceptions of the past, present, and future
  - Identify solutions
  - Develop action plans

- Program
- Action plans

### Step 3: Follow-up / short-term execution
- Follow-up:
  - Fine-tune action plans

- Revised action plans
- Project reports

#### Execution #1:
- Project 1
- Project 2
- Project 3

#### Follow-up:
- Summarized experiences/statuses
- Rework action plans

- New action plans

### Step 4: Follow-up / long-term execution
- Execution #2:
  - Project 1
  - Project 2
  - Project 3

- Decision to implement Future Search Conferences on an ongoing basis

*While the questions to be asked depend on the issue or topic of discussion, these are some examples:

**Past:** What is the background? What lessons can be drawn?

**Present:** What works and doesn’t work now? What are our needs?

**Future:** What do we want to achieve? In 5 years? In 10 years? What can we do?*