

Frederick Edmund Emery

1925 - 1997

Background:

Fred Emery was an internationally renowned Australian social scientist best remembered for his profound research into practical and proven alternatives to bureaucratically structured organizations. His enduring legacy is the worldwide phenomenon of organizations restructuring themselves around self-managing work teams.

Throughout his life Fred had an unshakeable belief in the common sense and decency of ordinary people and their ability to manage themselves. Early in his working life in the West Australian coal mines, he observed first hand the anti-social behavior of workers who had no decision making built into their jobs.

After receiving his PhD from Melbourne University in 1953 he set about establishing a practical alternative to the bureaucratic organization by designing one based on self-managing work teams.

During the 1950's Fred joined the Tavistock Institute in London where he provided the intellectual leadership of the now famous European socio-technical systems research projects. These projects proved conclusively that highly adaptive, responsive organizations structured as self-managing work teams produced greater human and organizational benefits than existing bureaucratic structures.

At the same time he formalized the Theory of Open Systems, from which he translated the Search Conference (SC) for strategic planning and the socio-technical systems design (STS) process for self-managing teams. This theory now forms a cornerstone of modern management organizational theory.



When Fred returned to Australia in 1969 he advanced his research into Open Systems Theory and in 1971 developed and pioneered the Participative Design Workshop (PDW) for establishing organizations built on self-managing teams. Participative Design (PD) is one of the most effective processes known today for establishing highly adaptive and responsive organizations.

During a prolific career, Fred received international recognition as an intellectual leader and brilliant social scientist in fields as diverse as systems thinking, organizational theory, communications, penology, education, political studies, marketing, defense studies, military strategy, drug addiction, learning and perception.

Up until his death Fred continued his outstanding theoretical and practical research towards improving the human condition, and for many years to come people will benefit from his profound contribution.

A learning organization is one structured in such a way that its members can learn and continue to learn within it. The organizational structure itself is an environment for continuing education (Emery, M. 1993:

Over the last 40 years, the late Professor Fred Emery, world renowned Australian social scientist and organizational researcher, pioneered the development and application of a body of knowledge, known as Open Systems Theory (OST).

OST, underpinned by participative democratic principles, enables organizations and communities to plan and organize themselves in uncertain times. Around the world, OST principles and concepts are being adopted by many different organizations and communities to help them actively adapt to their changing environments.

Search Conference

The 'Search Conference' (SC) has been translated from Open Systems Theory (see below) and is the name of the Participative strategic planning process developed by Fred Emery and Eric Trist in 1959 while working for the Tavistock Institute in London. Since its inception, Fred, and his partner Merrelyn Emery, have devoted many years of in depth action research to improve the effectiveness of the SC.

Today it is a well proven planning process for both organizations and communities operating in uncertain contextual and task environments (see below). It is a highly reliable method for active adaptive strategic planning and is designed to create a learning, planning community committed to its own future.

During a properly planned SC, participants develop common ground around an identified

SC purpose, which is expressed as a desirable and achievable future of their system within a contextual environment, and the strategies and action plans to move forward.

Participative Design

Although the Search Conference creates understanding of how the environment and system fit together for the most desirable future, it is insufficient on its own to maintain active adaptation in the long term. To do this an organization must change its fundamental structure or design principles.

To change from a bureaucratic (Design Principle 1) to a democratic structure (Design Principle 2) requires a process that, like the Search Conference, has been translated from open systems theory.

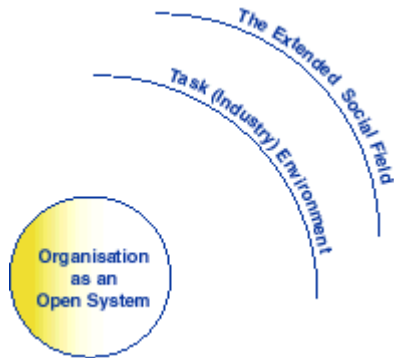
In 1971 Fred Emery developed and pioneered the Participative Design process for changing organizational design principles. It is the most effective and efficient process known today for creating democratic organizational structures in which members have a shared responsibility for attaining agreed outcomes.

It is a coherent strategy whereby management and operational employees within an organization are given the concepts and tools to redesign their workplace using democratic principles. By pooling employee knowledge and initiatives for change, they themselves can redesign their workplace.

The benefits of establishing democratic structures by applying the Participative

Design process are translated to the bottom line in a relatively short space of time.

An Organization in context with the Environment



The term 'extended social field' (or the contextual environment) refers the field beyond an organization's industry or task environment. It is the environment where there are currently dramatic and discontinuous shifts in social values and community expectations and therefore the choices people make. There have been and will be dire consequences for those organizations that ignore this field or assume it is stable.

Open Systems Theory (OST) maintains that people and their organizations must have an open and actively adaptive relationship with the contextual environment over time to ensure viability.

Transorganizational Development

Resources:

http://www.fredemery.com.au/home/About_FEI/Fred_Emery/body_fred_emery.html

<http://web.nmsu.edu/~dboje/TDemerys.html>

Participative Design for Participative Democracy.



A collection of papers on Open Systems Theory translated methodology of Participative design and Search Conference from Professor Fred

Emery, Dr. Merrelyn Emery and Professor Alan Davies.