Principles of Consultation
Applied to the Process of Innovation in a Corporate Environment

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Abstract

Innovation is a prime requisite for industrial growth, but ill a large corporation many factors can obstruct this process. One of the root factors is the inability of creative employees to communicate ideas and intentions effectively to their organization and the organization's limited ability to listen and judge ideas dispassionately and then take appropriate action. This article focuses on how the process of consultation, as elaborated in the writings of the Bahá'í Faith, can enhance this communication to promote innovation.

Human beings are predisposed to nobility. Bad habits, however deep-seated, are learned behaviors. Creative and effective solutions to human needs can be derived by appealing to that which is noble in people.

By mobilizing human and material resources, corporations play a crucial role in innovating solutions to human needs. Effective mobilization harnesses creativity and channels the talents of diverse individuals towards essential goals.

In a small organization (fewer than 200 people), one individual can direct innovation and management; in a large organization (greater than 200 people), these functions are, as a matter of necessity, divided into well-defined roles. As an organization grows, its structure becomes more complex, and tasks become more and more differentiated and specialized.

Ironically, this specialization in large organizations produces many obstacles to innovation. When corporations understand these obstructions, they can then begin to design processes to transcend them. This paper describes:

- The obstacles in a large organization that hinder the release of the creative potential of its employees;
- The theory of the process of consultation as it applies to the release of the creative potential; and
- An example of an existing application of a consultative model in a large organization.
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The Problem

Bureaucratic "Maze"

There is a fundamental difference between creativity and innovation in a corporate environment. Creativity is the act of conceiving a novel idea; innovation involves putting that idea into practice and reaping its benefits.

Business organizations are interested in innovation, not just creativity. Good ideas are not enough—they must produce results. But while the innovation process can be managed, the creativity that fuels it stems from a necessarily disorganized and diffuse process.

Creative ideas originate in unexpected corners of an institution. Often creative ideas die there as welt, not because they are poor ideas but because the organization has no means of identifying and nurturing them. There are a number of reasons why good ideas don't survive the bureaucratic maze:

- They seem impractical;
- They lie outside the realm of the department where they originate;
- They have not been well developed;
- Management is already loaded down with its traditional work;

- People fear (sometimes justly so) that their idea will be stolen;
- Idea generators hesitate to appear foolish or impractical.

Depending on the pressure placed on a given manager, she or he can be largely unsympathetic to the eccentric ideas voiced by an employee. Perhaps the ideas relate to an entirely different department, or perhaps the employee is thinking above his or her rank.

Moreover, managers in bureaucracies are invested with the responsibility of conserving resources—paramount to the preservation of the organization. Innovative ideas initially drain these resources with a promise of future return. Consequently, bureaucratic managers look with great suspicion at innovative ideas and tend to reject them initially.

Ideas, even the best ideas, are not hatched whole. For ideas to be innovative they need a chance to develop. They face two impediments in this process: the problems of interpersonal strife, and the multi-layered, complex natters of the corporate infrastructure.

"Personality Clashes"

Human beings are diverse. Each has different needs, and each uses different personality facets to meet those needs. Diversity can be a rich asset: a group, harnessing the different strengths of each person, can often solve complex problems better than a single individual. However, it can also be a liability—especially when it engenders conflict. A lack of appreciation of differences evokes the conflict-inducing side of diversity, leading to estrangement. Estrangement can, in turn, lead to alienation. Appreciation of diversity, however, leads to trust. Estrangement/alienation and trust play stronger roles in the potential funding of ideas than, in many cases, the idea's contents themselves. Essentially, people are influenced by people they trust and whom they perceive as able to deliver results—not just by a perceived "idea machine"

A useful framework for discussing human diversity as it relates to problem-solving has been developed by M.J. Kirton in *Kirton Adaption/Innovation Inventory* (KA1). The manner in which a person interacts with his or her environment when solving problems is referred to as creative style. Kirton's model places people on a normally distributed continuum between adaptively and innovatively creative.
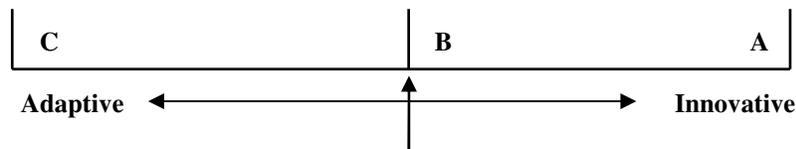

Figure 1: Kirton's Continuum

In the above chart, the letters symbolize different people with differing creative styles. *A* is located on the innovative side of the continuum, and *C* is located on the adaptive side. *B* is more adaptively creative than *A* even though both are on the innovatively creative side, *C*, however, is more adaptively creative than either *B* or *A* since *C* is farther to the adaptive side of the continuum. *A*, as well, is more innovatively creative than *B* on the relative scale. Though *A* and *B* are on the same side of the continuum, they will perceive each other as having significantly different styles because of their relative position on the scale. This can be measured by the Kirton Adaption—Innovation Inventory (KAI).

Adaptively creative people "operate cognitively within the confines of the pattern in which a problem is initially perceived. Their creativity is less likely to challenge existing frameworks" (Gryskiewicz, "Creative" 2). By contrast, innovatively creative people "are more likely to treat patterns as part of the problem. The problem is redefined and results in a creativity style that goes outside of the problem definition" (Gryskiewicz, "Creative" 2).

In other words, the adaptor generates ideas within a given structure or box and sees the boundaries as firm end-points. The innovator, however, generates ideas both inside and outside the structure or box and does not see the boundaries as rigid or confining.

Even though different people might ultimately achieve similar results, the very way they go about solving problems can generate misunderstanding and conflict. Kirton notes that, whereas the adaptor is characterized by precision, reliability, efficiently methodicalness, prudence, discipline, [and] conformity," the innovator is seen as (undisciplined, thinking tangentially, approaching tasks from unsuspected angles" (Kirton, "Adaptors and

Innovators" 623).

The management of vast resources inclines most large organizations to function on the adaptive side of Kirton's continuum. This leads to the perception of the adaptor as "sound, comforting, safe [and] dependable," and the innovator as unsound, impractical; often shocking his or her opposite" (Kirton, *Adaption-Innovation Inventory* 16). Adaptors typically perceive innovators as "neurotic, extroverted, extrapunitive, and inner-directed" while innovators perceive adaptors as "stodgy, timid and compliant"' (Kirton, *Adaption-Innovation Inventory* 69-70). Differences in creative styles exist in all areas within corporations. People who generate many ideas (more innovatively creative on the continuum) tend to exhibit creative styles quite different from those whose job it is to manage the corporate resources (more adaptively creative relative to the innovator on the continuum) (Rosenfeld, "Innovation through Investment" 113).

Because managers have decision-making powers, they must act as resource gatekeepers. The conflict that can arise between idea generators and resource gatekeepers is likely to occur because of these differences in style. Human diversity, which could contribute enormously to the organization, can, despite good intentions, lead to misunderstanding and distrust.

Non-Conducive Environment
The corporate environment itself can prevent ideas from reaching fruition. People are far less likely to risk sharing ideas in the absence of trust and support. This is further compounded by the likelihood of punishment for failures in a risk-adverse environment. The corporate environment can easily evoke feelings of coldness, unreceptively, consciousness of rank, and competitiveness.

The physical and emotional environment contributes to or detracts from the number of participants in the innovation process within the organization. Even under the most adverse conditions, a few people will participate in generating and implementing innovative ideas. There will always be the Ketterings, Fords, Carlsons, and Edisons who will create under any condition. However, it is vital in the day in which we live to involve as many individuals as possible to unleash the God-given creativity available within all organizations: otherwise, survival of the organization is at risk.

Each person has a different level of receptivity, comfort, and ease in each environment. The challenge is to create an environment—both physical and emotional that will release the creative potential of the greatest number of employees.

Summary of Obstacles
Any organization generally maintains a well-defined structure and pays close attention to traditional activities that bear fruit. However, the effectiveness of this structure to promote innovation can be seriously limited, in the long run, by the inability of the organization to promote effective communication and the development of ideas. This became vitally important as the need for rapid response to internal and external changes increases (e.g. in markets, personnel, social systems). Successful change will depend upon management's ability to use the diversity of its workforce, including both adaptive and innovative creative styles simultaneously.

The Theory of Consultation
Someone once said that the greatest problem in communication is the illusion it has been achieved. Miscommunication is as much the rule as the exception. It is often easier to maintain a pattern of misunderstandings than to struggle to grasp a different way of viewing the world. When ideas that need to be communicated are coupled to reward, status, or political dynamics and/or they require a quantum jump to a new level of understanding (paradigm shifts), it is no wonder miscommunication and misunderstandings are the results.

Within corporations, one must communication to survive. The quality of survival depends on the effect of that communication. Effective communication can be significantly enhanced through consultation.

Consultation
Consultation is a method of communication. Unlike most communication, however, it is structured to find a solution to a problem or determine a course of action—it is solution-driven.
Consultation is described in the writings of the Bahá'í Faith as a process built on spiritual principles and intended to have definite social outcomes:

> Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through

consultation. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Consultation* 1)

Consultation contains two components: an objective and a method. It is spiritual in nature, derived directly from the spiritual teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, aimed at truth-seeking. Equally important, it is practical—a tool to behavioralize the Bahá'í principle of "unity in diversity." It embodies a method with prescriptions for good communication.

The general characteristics of the consultative method are as follows:

> . . . consultation must have for its object the investigation of truth. He who expresses an opinion should not voice it as correct and right but set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion, for the light of reality becomes apparent when two opinions coincide. A spark is produced when flint and steel come together. Man should weigh his opinions with the utmost serenity, calmness and composure.
> Before expressing his own views he should carefully consider the views already advanced by others. lf he finds that a previously expressed opinion is more true and worthy, he should accept it immediately and not willfully hold to an opinion of his own. By this excellent method he endeavors to arrive at unity and truth. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 72)

What emerges are three basic features of consultation. First, it is oriented toward meeting group goals. It focuses the contributions of individual members on uncovering all relevant facts and views of a given problem.

Second, the discovery of truths depends on using the diversity of opinions and styles. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that, "The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions" (*Selections* 87). Consultation is not, therefore, a process whereby decisions are left to the powerful and the charismatic. It frees the individual to give of his or her self in a group framework. It asks that one weigh carefully one's words next to others' and strive to take on the views that are found to be haler and more worthy. It inculcates an understanding of the difference between one's own ideas and truth as it emerges from the group.

Finally, consultation is built on respect. It demands that no one should ever be belittled. Group members must value the contributions of all other group members. Too often, people invoke hierarchy—might makes right—in their dealings with others. They strive to make themselves and their opinions dominant. Leadership in this context is confused with domination. Consultation, in contrast, requires full participation of all members, and leadership is expressed in service to the group.

True respect is manifested through words and deeds. Without respect, there can be no trust and without trust, it is not possible to capitalize on human diversity. Intimidation silences the meek, and disrespect antagonizes the proud. Groups cannot afford such silences if their aim is to solve problems larger than themselves—larger than their need to intimidate, larger than their pride.

Consultation is a set of prescriptions to guide action, not an idealistic description of how the world should be. Consequently, we have derived from the Bahá'í writings a useful set of practical principles for groups involved in innovation in large organizations (see Table 1).

Consultation is therefore distinct from normal, unreflective communication. It is propelled by goals, formed by the sincere collective will of individuals, and made successful by the integration of differences within a framework of unity. This is the key element—that unity of thought and action enlarges from an acceptance of difference, not in its negation. Uniformity is no more desirable in groups than conceit and self-centeredness are in individuals.

Each of the above principles is central to innovation in an organization. The consultative methodology can balance the rigidity of a corporate structure, allowing ideas to navigate successfully through a complex system.

TABLE 1

CONSULTATION: TURNING CONJECTURE INTO CERTAINTY

Purpose
- Create team commitment and build trust among diverse participants;
- Identify opportunities and solve problems;
- Determine the best course of action.

Principles for Success
- Respect each participant and appreciate each one's diversity. This is the prime requisite for consultation.

- Value and consider all contributions. Belittle none. Withhold evaluation until sufficient information has been gathered.
- Contribute and express opinions with complete freedom.
- Carefully consider the views of others—if a valid point of view has been offered, accept it as your own as well.
- Keep to the mission at hand. Extraneous conversation may be important to team-building, but it is not consultation. Consultation is solution-driven.
- Share in the group's unified purpose—desire for success of the mission.
- Expect the truth to emerge from the clash of differing opinions. Optional solutions emerge from a diversity of opinion.
- Once stated, let go of opinions. "Ownership" of ideas causes disharmony among the team. It almost always gets in the way of finding the truth.
- Contribute to maintaining a friendly atmosphere by speaking with courtesy, dignity, care, and moderation. This will promote unity and openness.
- Aim at achieving consensus. If, however consensus is impossible, let the majority rule.

Remember, though, that decisions, once made, become the decision of every participant. Dissenting opinions are destructive to the success of the mission. When decisions are undertaken with total group support, wrong decisions can be more fully observed and corrected.

The practice of these principles, like any art form, takes time.
These principles are effective—not immediately efficient.

The Application of Consultation
'Abdu'l-Bahá makes clear what role consultation should play in industry:

> . . . when a man hath a project to accomplish, should he consult with some of his brethren, that which is agreeable will of course be investigated and unveiled to his eyes, and the truth will be disclosed. Likewise on a higher level, should the people of a village consult one another about their affairs, 'the right solution will certainly be revealed. In like manner, the members of each profession, such as in industry, should consult, and those in commerce should similarly consult on business affairs. In short, consultation is desirable and acceptable in all things and on all issues. (*Consultation* 6)

When one puts consultation principles into practice in an organizational environment, what are the real-world results? For the process to achieve its greatest effectiveness, it must be institutionalized and adapted to the host's culture.

People serving different functions in an institution have different needs and develop organizational personalities in line with their needs. One person is responsible for selling finished products; naturally that person is less concerned with how the product got there than is the engineer tinkering with the production line. How can these diverse people be enabled to communicate with each other? They need to build bridges.

Bridges traditionally do not fall within organizational roles. Rather, they connect roles. They are no more part of management than they are of staff. They represent a new category of organizational function. Consultation as an institutional bridging tool, therefore, transcends the difficulties inherent in rigid corporate roles.

An example of the application of consultation in industry is the Office of Innovation (OI) model, first established at Eastman Kodak Company in 1979 by Robert Rosenfeld. This model has been adopted and modified to fit the culture of numerous corporations and organizations worldwide including Amoco Chemical Company, Union Carbide, American Greeting Cards, Atomic Energy of Canada, Hallmark Cards, and the Electronic Security Command of the United States Air Force. The Office of Innovation model can serve to illustrate this new mediating category.

Office of Innovation
The Office of Innovation model was founded with the intention of creating a system in which good ideas could be recognized and developed in a large corporate environment. The Mission Statement (1986) for the Office of Innovation at Eastman Kodak asserts:

- Based primarily on originator's drive, to avail to him/her a pathway to personal development by giving

ideas (*not related to immediate job assignment*) a fair chance to succeed through counsel, enhancement, and idea connections.

- To avail to all levels of the corporation's management a maximum *quality* of ideas (evolutionary and revolutionary) generated primarily by Kodak employees, which will strengthen the company's position for the future, financially, strategically, and image-wise , predominantly through the creation of new business opportunities.

Let's analyze Eastman Kodak's OI Mission Statement. The first component relates to the individual. The Office of Innovation model tries to meet the needs of the wide range of employees so they can' contribute to the generation and development of ideas. It serves them and aids in their personal and professional development. Further, it ensures that ideas which come from outside an individual's department or immediate work situation receive a fair hearing. For example, a person who works in a chemical laboratory has an idea involving coating technology that does not directly relate to normally assigned work. In most traditional corporations: that person would not have an outlet for this potentially profitable idea. Pursuing ideas outside one's normal work assignment may result in a battle against established institutional norms rather than the development of opportunities. The Office of Innovation serves to overcome this bureaucratic labyrinth.

The second component of the Mission of the Office of Innovation refers to developing ideas that promote the growth of the company. Ideas that evolve through the Office are aimed at strengthening the company. This fundamental goal can ideally be shared by all participants. A fundamental assumption of the model is that a company which promotes the contributions of its employees is one which generates company loyalty. People unite around promoting the company.

Those companies that recognize and encourage the contributions of their employees are more likely to foster the support, loyalty, and creativity demanded by future challenges. Those organizations that cannot generate loyalty in the long run cannot hope to survive in an increasingly competitive market.

The mission statements of organizations that adopt the Office of Innovation model will necessarily reflect current corporate needs and goals. However, the following two components remain the pillars of the OI models.

- Release of creative human potential;
- Development of innovative ideas.

The baseline philosophy of the Office of Innovation (Rosenfeld, "development") places the principles of consultation within the context of the corporation. These points directly influence the actual players who use the Office of Innovation model.

Office of Innovation Philosophy

- Ideas are fragile. So are people.
- Ideas are organic and need to be nurtured. So do people.
- All ideas have value and should be given a hearing.
- The originator of an idea needs assistance in enhancing that idea and in promoting it internally.
- The originator is the initial advocate of an idea and should be actively involved with its development.
- Only ideas which have been enhanced and which demonstrate potential value will be brought to the attention of management.
- Both marketing and technical issues need to be addressed in the development of an idea.
- Individuals can benefit from the opportunity to interact with those of differing perspectives.
- Individual differences in perspective and attitude constitute a strength, not a weakness.
- A mediator is often necessary to facilitate the communication of people who come from different cultures and who may possess clashing personalities.
- The most effective way to proceed is not necessarily the most efficient.

The mechanics of the idea networking system in the Office of Innovation show how the consultation process can work in an actual situation. This system is made up of two components: The people who work with the idea, and the process they follow.

The People
There are four categories of participants in this idea connection process: Idea Originators, Idea Facilitators, Idea

Enhancers, and Idea Promoters. Many individuals can serve in one or more of these categories. They consequently assist ideas to jump over traditional bureaucratic hurdles. An idea connection process includes three general events: an idea generation process (submission); a sifting process (screening or evaluations); and a connection process (promotion).

IDEA ORIGINATORS. An originator is a person who generates ideas and whose motivations can range from simple curiosity and playfulness to the serious need to create something. The originator can be prolific or moderate in idea generation and can have varying commitment to participating in the actions required to promote his or her ideas. Since all ideas face a multiplicity of hurdles, both technical and business, often another individual is needed to assist (he originator, as the originator's expertise may rest in other areas.

"Classic" originators often possess the characteristics of the innovatively creative style described by Kirton. They think outside of the current paradigm and are likely to produce many ideas in a disorganized fashion. Frequently, they have difficulty fitting into highly stratified (hierarchical) systems. They can appear abrasive to management, as though they were trying to undermine the systems. This is understandable as they are notably unattached to tradition—and even to what may be called common sense. Like their ideas, idea originators can be somewhat difficult to control. In many cases they require someone to act as a bridge or translator between themselves and the more adaptive structure.

IDEA FACILITATORS. The idea-connection process requires a mediational structure that links elaborators to decision makers (funders) and sources of information outside of their own expertise. Without such a system, the idea originator is likely to have great difficulty getting ideas beyond the conceptual phase.

The facilitator focuses the mediation. After an idea is submitted, she or he monitors and guides the development of the idea through to its conclusion its eventual acceptance or exclusion. The job of the facilitator is *not* to advocate all ideas unconditionally. Rather she or he uncovers, jointly with the originator, through a "pulling-out" process, the value inherent in the idea so that it becomes apparent. The assumption is simple: if the facilitator promotes the best representation of an idea, the truth of the idea's value will become apparent. This comes about only through the process of consultation.

Not everyone makes a good facilitator. A good facilitator needs to be at ease with all kinds of people—understanding the different personality types acting in the corporate setting. She or he must basically like people and act with the conviction that the acceptance of human diversity is fundamental to group decision-making. Finally, the facilitator's ego should be relatively immune to the outcome of the process. This category calls for an attitude of detachment and service: service to the idea, to the idea originator, and to the overall goals of the organization.

IDEA ENHANCERS. Idea enhancers are made up of consultants and technicians. Their role is to give thoughtful written and/or verbal advice on the feasibility of an idea. This advice is intended to help the idea originator position his or her idea to organizational needs and the body of knowledge or research in closely related subjects.

Consultants can come from anywhere in the organization. They are chosen carefully by the idea originator and the facilitated for their experience in the particular subject area of the idea and for any other criteria the originator deems important.

The job of the consultant is to evaluate the idea based on his or her experience with the subject matter. Participation of the consultant is voluntary anti not part of his or her assigned work.

In some implementations of the OI model, there are technicians who work for the Office of Innovation itself. Their job is to run short experiments on submitted ideas to get a quick estimate of how technologically successful the idea is likely to be. Additionally, they run informational searches (e.g., marketing intelligence, research literature) for the originator and team. As staff members of the Office of Innovation their primary responsibility is service to the idea originators and to the consultants.

IDEA PROMOTERS. Idea promoters are made up of champions and sponsors. To promote means to act as a spokesperson for or to advocate. A central theme of idea connection processes is that in order for an idea to receive funding, it is necessary that there be credible advocacy on behalf of the idea; it is not sufficient for it to be just a good idea. An idea must make its way up management hierarchies to a level at which it can be actualized. Idea promoters act as bridges between the originator and the decision-makers in the corporation.

The champion is the first promoter of an idea. She or he is generally someone with enough status or clout in the company to be heard by management (and sponsors). The champion is fundamentally a translator and conduit between diverse organizational sectors and the idea originator.

The sponsor, likewise a promoter, is generally someone with high status within the corporation. If a

sponsor advocates an idea, he or she can supply resources (money, people, equipment) to carry the idea to a higher level of financing (possibly to complete commercialization or implementation).

The sponsor gains prestige for himself or herself and the organization by successfully implementing a good idea. The sponsor risks associating his or her name and status with an unproven idea. Therefore, an idea must be refined and presented to the sponsor in a mature fashion. This must include specifying the risk involved and the proposed stages for implementation. Since the sponsor promotes the idea, the sponsor walks the furthest out on a limb. Status in a corporation, after all, comes from success not from taking chances.

Every one of these participants is essential—and each has different needs. It is central to the working of this system that every person be regarded as fundamental to the process itself. The successful implementation of the Office of Innovation model demonstrates how the people in the idea connection process and the application of the principles of consultation interact.

The Process

In the initial steps of the process, the work of the Office of Innovation falls outside the traditional corporate structure and management hierarchies. Most ideas, those within the employee's assigned work area, do not flow through the Office of Innovation. It is with those ideas outside normal work arenas that the Office provides its most effective service. It provides alternative pathways for ideas (that are easily lost in the bureaucracy) by making them accessible to different sectors of the corporation. Participation in the Office of Innovation process is voluntary. Therefore, its first goal is to create an environment that nurtures ideas and people.

The actual physical layout of the Office of Innovation must be carefully designed. This is not a superficial concern; a physical environment is the first step in conveying openness, trust, warmth, support and service. People respond far more positively and creatively in a homey environment than in a stereotypical dentist's office.

When the Office of Innovation at Kodak first opened in 1979, it tried to create an atmosphere that would neither seem intimidating to idea originators nor discussible to the managers and consultants who expected a certain standard of physical decorum. The office is, after all, a bridge between different kinds of people', all must feel at home and welcome. Without such an atmosphere, trust cannot be established, and without a good measure of trust, there can never be consultation.

What does "trust" mean in this context? The idea originators must feel that no one will criticize them for their ideas. They need the assurance, backed up by example, that no one—neither the facilitator nor the consultants—will inadvertently or intentionally take any credit away from them. They need to know they are in control of the progress of their idea, even to the extent of initially maintaining their anonymity within the organization throughout initial idea review. Ultimately, it means knowing that the Office is there to serve them.

Likewise, the managerial sector of the company must be able to rely on the Office to give it a candid presentation of ideas. Managers need a clear and comprehensive picture portraying the true merits of an idea in order to make a good decision. They must have full confidence that the Office is there to serve the organization.

IDEA SUBMISSION. The first stage of the idea submission process occurs when the idea originator and the facilitated meet to discuss an idea. This first meeting is informal—inside or outside the formal office environment. Its aim is exploratory: exploration of the idea and its possibilities is the main objective, while both facilitator and idea originator begin to build a trusting relationship. During this initial stage of the idea's growth, the facilitator often asks about the originator's background, shares similar interests and experiences, perhaps even shares solve of the difficulties time facilitated has had getting his or her own ideas heard in the past.

This exploration, known as idea enhancement, begins tile pulling-out process that will lead to the germ of truth inherent in all ideas. This process, stretching over a period of a couple of meetings to a couple of months, results in a document (sometimes known as an Idea Memorandum, Idea Proposal, Opportunity Proposal) or the decision by the idea originator not to proceed. The document officially associates the idea with the originator's name to allay the fears of having his or her idea credited elsewhere and to protect the organization by establishing an early date for the idea (patent and copyright necessities).

Facilitators must be skilled at idea- enhancement techniques . These techniques aid in the transformation of the initial idea into the beginning of a business reality or organizational opportunity. Typically a facilitator participates in a rigorous training program (six-eight months) to develop and build this strong skill-base.

If the originator wishes to proceed, the document passes on to consultants for evaluation and refinement, continuing the idea-connection process. Consultants' feedback can be given in written or verbal form.

IDEA EVALUATION. The process of idea evaluation is multi-tired. It involves screening ideas, refining ideas, and group review' of ideas. In this phase, the facilitator and originator work and prepare ideas for presentation to

management through promotion and sponsorship. Good ideas need to be as fully delineated as possible; ideas that are not as useful or well developed need to be put aside. The evaluation and refinement phase acts as an essential bridge between the idea originator and the initial champions or sponsors within the company.

There are three steps to idea evaluation. The first, screening, involves five to fifteen consultants chosen by the idea originator with the help of the facilitator to further develop and determine basic technical feasibility or market assessment for the idea. The consultants are chosen either for their particular expertise in fields related to the idea or for reasons of the originator own choosing.

The consultants each receive a copy of the idea document along with a brief questionnaire. They are asked to comment on many aspects of the idea, including its novelty its impact on market needs, its technological feasibility, etc. They note any additions they would make to improve the idea and indicate whether or not they wish to be involved in any further review and/or elaboration.

After the verbal and/or written comments are gathered, the originator and the facilitator meet in step two of the Idea Evaluation process to decide whether or not to proceed with the idea. If comments were overwhelmingly negative, it is unlikely the originator will choose to continue. A more likely outcome is for the originator and the facilitator, based on positive and negative input, to discuss necessary refinements to the idea document. It is necessary for the facilitator to attenuate the response of the idea originator.

For example, when negative feedback drags the originator down, it is the role of the facilitator to bolster the originator up by pointing out the positive aspects of the idea and the evaluation process. Conversely, when feedback is positive, it would be necessary to temper the originator's enthusiasm with a little reality therapy. The facilitator's role is constantly to help the individual make knowledgeable and discriminating decisions. The decision on whether or not to proceed is always made by the originator, thus promoting his or her professional development.

Although meetings up to this point have predominantly included the facilitator and the idea originator, they have embodied the qualities of consultation. Ideas have been carefully heard, and the originator has been encouraged to see the merits of his or her idea through the eyes of the needs of the organization. The idea has been nurtured, with judgment "suspended until sufficient information has been gathered." Likewise, it has been discussed in a warm atmosphere also as to promote unity and openness.

More formally structured consultation occurs in step three of idea evaluation: group review. The facilitator and the originator choose the participants—usually, consultants who have reviewed the idea and who wish to remain involved. The goal of the group review meeting or meetings is to refine the idea to the point at which a champion or sponsor can be identified or it becomes clear that the idea should be dropped.

The success of the group review meetings depends on adherence to the process of consultation. No other process can effectively bridge the very different backgrounds, voices, training levels, personalities, and motivations assembled there. The goal is to decide whether or not the idea can be developed into something useful for the organization.

Consultation calls for each participant to share his or her own view openly. The group review meeting is structured to make it easier for the originator to let go of his or her idea if it becomes apparent that the idea would not work within the context of the goals of the organization. A consultative environment makes it easier for consultants to accept unconventional or even revolutionary ideas that otherwise would be instantly rejected for not fitting within the consultant's perspective. It is the responsibility of the facilitator to set up and maintain this environment. What ultimately makes the process work is the originator's faith in the facilitator's ability to enhance and connect tile idea, as well as the facilitator's certitude in the process.

Thus the consultants and the originator, with the guidance of tile facilitator, strive to recognize the potential of the idea. During the group review period, the idea document will go through a series of modifications. These modifications will be affected by experiments performed, potential products identified, and market assessment.

The product of the group review period is the identifications of potential champions or the dropping of the idea. The next phase of the idea-connection process is one of promotion, championship, and ultimately sponsorship.

IDEA PROMOTION. The initial processes have, until this phase, worked through informal networks. These networks, made by personal request and personal interest, form a solid foundation for gathering and sorting ideas. They work outside of the corporate hierarchy and are hence outside of the managerial structure. If ideas are eventually to succeed, however, they must at some point feed into the traditional organizational structure.

Managers take ideas seriously—even in rejecting them. They, after all, are responsible for the organization's resources. It follows, therefore, that they have the ultimate abi1ity and responsibility to sponsor ideas and transform them into reality. For an originator, sponsors are the difference between a potential idea and an adopted one.

The act of finding a sponsor constitutes the most serious form of bridge-building to be done in the idea-

connection process. This bridge must link people working in different types of jobs, often of different personality types, spanning goals and motivations, even clothing styles. It links the two opposing forces necessary for organizational survival—creation (by innovation) and preservation (by attention to monetary well-being).

It is the job of the facilitator, the originator, and the group collectively to find a sponsor or a champion for the idea. Rosenfeld has previously described his experience in the search for a sponsor:

> If [the idea] really looks good, I begin searching for a sponsor. A sponsor is someone who has clout within the company. He may be from any sector of the company, and more often than not is from management. I pay a visit to the potential sponsor and present the idea to him. My approach is like that of a salesman going on the road. Through a series of channels I have developed over the past few years, I hunt for the most receptive person. I try to interest him in the idea. I bring available data to him. ("Development and Philosophy" 124)

The facilitator tries to act in the best interest of the idea. She or he must somehow link the two ends of the bridge spoken of earlier—and this involves discussion among the originator, the facilitator, and the sponsor or champion. The facilitator must therefore create an environment embodying the principles of consultation for the true value of tile idea to come to light. If the facilitator, the originator, or group can find a potential sponsor, the originator will generally present the idea. If successful, and a sponsor emerges to fund the idea, the idea enters normal channels in the organizational structure. This completes the ro1e of the facilitator, and the idea leaves the facilitator's hands. Approximately ten percent of the ideas entering the Office of Innovation become sponsored, and about four percent of all ideas become a commercial or organizational reality.

Building the Better Bridge

To what extent is harmony really possible between the inventing sector of an organization and its bureaucracy? Inventors, generally speaking, understand and like invention. At some point in their career, they face the question: "What is this whole management structure for whom I'm doing the inventing?" Managers likewise have their set of concerns. They frequently find themselves asking a different question: "Why won't the people in my division just buckle down and do what we tell them to do?" The problem is one of understanding and appreciating the need for diversity. Different people most fill different roles if any joint enterprise is to succeed. Managers especially (as those that are responsible for the organization) face a difficult task in dealing with others who may not share the same picture or commitment to the goals of the organization.

Just the same, corporations (and organizations) that lose track of their need to nurture and support technological and procedural innovation place themselves at a competitive disadvantage. For managers, the task is daunting: on the one hand, they must preserve and enhance the resources of the company in the interests of shareholders (the very reason bureaucracies are formed); on the other hand, they need to risk these very same resources in bringing new products and services to the marketplace.

Innovators are interested in seeing their ideas put into practice. Managers are interested in protecting the organization. Each has a legitimate interest, and each can serve the other in a balanced system. Without managers, innovators would not have (he organizational structures in place that allow them to innovate, without innovators, managers would eventually find themselves managing the dismemberment of their bankrupt, obsolete company.

A true consultative mechanism can allow people in managerial and innovative roles to match what they do with the needs of people in the other roles better. The payback to both groups is impressive: managers get better ideas, higher levels of commitment, and an accelerated product development (or social change) cycle; innovators get encouragement, rewards, and better job satisfaction. The rest of us, though, are real winners—we get better products and services.

Summary and Conclusion

The weaving of the organizational fabric becomes ever more important as existing organizations restructure into smaller units (e.g., the movement towards Strategic Business Units–SBUs) where the functioning of one unit is almost totally independent of the functioning of the other. Idea-connection systems, specializing in enhancement and consultation processes, offer tremendous possibilities within the SBU for idea development and, when networked across SBUs, for knitting the goals of the overall organization one to another.

The consultative process if the Office of Innovation model can be summarized as follows:

- **Promote a healthy diversity of opinion. Successful innovation depends on it.**

The best answers to practical problems emerge from the interaction of people with different strengths, different motivations, and different "worldviews."

- **Don't judge an idea until all information has been gathered.**
  Good ideas are often lost behind small problems of detail. Allow ideas to be revised following consultative input.

- **Share views openly without judging any individual.**
  Diversity is a question of practical importance—to find the "shining spark of truth" wherever it resides. It is also a question of the fundamental need for input other than one's own. In the Bahá'í sense, this is done for the love of God and of his creatures. In a business sense, it is done because it works!

- **Create a warm, friendly atmosphere to promote unity of purpose and openness among diverse elements of the company**.
  The physical and el-notional atmosphere sets the tone for any interaction. Warmth begets warmth; good will begets good will; trustworthiness begets trust.

Consultation is an immensely valuable took. The future of any complex social systems or organization in this age depends on how well it is put into practice.

Consultation requires work. It requires that people overcome entrenched habits: shed centuries of accumulated cultural debris, mature beyond the miscommunications and egotisms encouraged by nineteenth-century industrial practice. The movement from autocratic, authoritarian egoism to the consultative process is no less possible (or possibly painful) than the various other social revolutions of our times.

The Office of Innovation model, although on the leading edge of today's organizational changes, is but the tip of the iceberg. New institutions designed to release the creative human capacity within organizations need to be developed. These institutions will work closely with existing systems and will be invested by the leadership with the responsibility of edifying both management and workers to the goals and visions of the organization. Although not invested with decision-making or implementation powers, its functions will be collaborative with the existing administrative structure and will facilitate communication by creating conduits necessary for weaving the fabric of the organization across various divisions, departments, and sectors at all levels. This collaboration, as is the process of consultation used by the Office of Innovation, is derived from the Bahá'í writings. It parallels the twin institutions—"rulers" and "learned"—whose responsibilities are administration and edification, respectively.

Humans are predisposed to nobility. However, consultation is not innate. It requires discipline and volition; and creativity and innovation require avenues of expression.

The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrances, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Consultation* 5)

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