



Self-Organization and Traditional Change Methods

The following are examples of how effective traditional change activities can be used in the context of adaptive systems. Use these methods to create containers, expose dynamic tensions, and foster conversations that matter.

Method	Description
Storytelling	Stories reveal patterns that emerged in an organization's past. Public storytelling is a method of sharing dynamic tensions in the history of the organization — how conversations and interactions connected people and created opportunities for transformation. Stories reinforce the organizational container by establishing one's membership in the system. Stories should be told publicly, not privately, so that the perception of "inner" and "outer" circles doesn't interfere with dialogue and systemwide self-organization.
Goal Setting	Goal setting is an effective way to establish containers for action. Given the uncertainty of an adaptive system, goals can provide consistency and unity of commitment across the organization. The focus should be on a continuous and iterative process of establishing short-term goals because longer-term goals are not meaningful in an unpredictable environment.
Strategic Planning	Generating a strategic plan will create feedback loops between the organization's default future and preferred future. Paradoxically, the likelihood of success will decrease if the gap between current and future state is too large, or if the plan fails to articulate a process that will support self-organization toward the stated goals.
Team Development	Supporting teams to become self-organizing and self-correcting creates "fractals" of effective action throughout the organization. Team development creates containers that enhance intrateam dialogue and self-organizing capabilities.
Fishbowl	A fishbowl can accelerate self-organizing by providing a microcosm of the larger system in a smaller and more manageable container. A fishbowl reveals dynamic tensions and provides opportunities to practice group dialogue and observational skills. If the differences in the larger group are unclear, unspoken, or not fairly represented by the fishbowl participants, this intervention technique may not work.
Large-Group Event	A number of large-group methodologies (e.g., open space, world café, and technology of participation) can be used to create subsets of the macro system. These events create a container in which lively dialogue, focused on critical dynamic tensions, can shift organizational culture as the process unfolds. Success and sustainability depend on how well an event reflects the realities of the organization.
Organization Design	Restructuring efforts are most effective when conditions for self-organization for the whole system have been identified. An organization design process will not succeed if it establishes impractical containers, creates silos and impermeable boundaries, or focuses on unimportant differences/tensions in the organization.
Conflict Resolution	Effective conflict resolution deals directly with difference in a way that reveals underlying assumptions and transforms relationships. "Stirring the pot" exposes dynamic tensions that provide insight and powerful breakthroughs in thinking. Merely examining similarities or "common ground" obfuscates underlying differences that drive unwanted behavior and outcomes in the system.
Building Trust	The process of building trust is emergent and is the result of the self-organizing activities of the whole system. Like conflict resolution, it is essential to deal with significant differences; otherwise, the stability gleaned from building trust could be short-lived.
Benchmarking and Best Practices	Because all adaptive systems are unique, it is important to analyze both similarities and differences between the "home system" and the benchmarked organization. Conditions may or may not hold true in another container. It is not realistic to assume that a complex solution can be taken from one system and implemented in another. Still, solutions can be collected that provide insights and examples that can impact an existing culture.

Adapted from Edwin E. Olson & Glenda H. Eoyang, *Facilitating Organization Change: Lessons from Complexity Science*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, 2001.