

Managing and Administering a Project – Adapting the Greenskills Way

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ABSTRACT: *This factsheet helps build the bridge across the “doing” of a project, shafting from theory into practice, and enabling participants to move from implementation to monitoring the progress of their project.*

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INTRODUCTION

How are we to really build an ecologically sustainable life supporting culture of the future? In these materials we have repeatedly shown that any culture that destroys its life support system whilst calling that progress is functionally insane. Unfortunately, when living in such a culture, it sustains itself by ensuring compliance or cooption of its participants by socialising them into its insanity. To be “normal” in such circumstances is to be part of the insanity, and to be sane is to be abnormal. The Dragon Dreaming workshops aim to not only encourage such abnormality, but to ensure steps are taken to ensure that it actually happens.

At the start of workshops I often talk of “the forgetting curve”. In most circumstances when people are explained something they forget 50% of what they learned within 24 hours. A further quarter is lost in a week, and by the end of a month, people are lucky if they remember one eighth of the material that was covered. This is an immense loss in terms of the time and costs attached to a workshop of training, but the situation can be improved. I generally make use of four methods.

1. Taking notes of what said, engages the hand and eye as well as the ear, and will slow the rate of forgetting. Reading one’s notes aloud as soon as possible after the session helps prevent the loss and forgetfulness.
2. Attaching an object to the specific workshop that one uses in daily life is also helpful. The Roman orator Cicero used to locate parts of his speech in imaginary places in the Roman forum and so could remember long speeches verbatim.
3. The best way to learn anything is to teach it. I encourage all attendees at workshops to take the time to teach the material to someone else as soon as possible. Not only will this help spread the ideas of Dragon Dreaming more widely in the community, more specifically it will help to significantly reduce the forgetting curve too.
4. Finally having a partner or “buddy”, with whom you can contact at regular intervals after the completion of the training also helps. It is useful for a number of reasons. Such partners are, as we see below, useful for supervision in the “doing” of projects too.

HELPFUL IDEAS

In her “Work that Reconnects”, Deep Ecologist and Buddhist Scholar Joanna Macy (one of the mentors who have inspired Dragon Dreaming), in preparing people for returning to the world, she gets people to work in pairs, where one acts as questioner/scribe and the other acts as a respondent. The questioner scribe writes in the record or the journal of the respondent what are the respondent’s answers to the following questions.

1. “If you knew that you could not fail, what would you be doing for the healing of our world? Here is our chance to pull out all stops and think big, with no ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’ getting in the way.” Alternatively “If you were liberated from all fear and open to the power available to you in the web of life, what would you do for the healing of our world?”
2. In pursuing this vision, what particular project do you want to undertake? It can be a new direction to what you are doing, or something entirely new. Here is our chance to get specific. Think in terms of what could be accomplished, or at least well underway in a year’s time.
3. What resources, inner and outer, do you now have that will help you do that? Inner resources include specific strengths of character and relevant experience, knowledge and skills that you’ve acquired. External resources include relationships, contacts and networks you can draw on – do not forget babysitters, rich uncles, computer savvy friends – as well as your location, employment, real goods and money in the bank.
4. Now what resources, inner and outer, do you need to acquire? To do what you want to do, what do you need to learn and obtain? These can run from assertiveness training to grants to contacts among organisations, churches, local merchants, and the support they can give you.
5. How might you stop yourself? What obstacles might you throw in your way of fulfilling your goals? We all have familiar patterns of self doubt and sabotage.
6. How will you overcome these obstacles? Draw upon your past experience in dealing with these self-imposed obstacles, and perhaps some new ways of moving around them will occur to you.
7. What can you do in the next 24 hours, no matter how small the step – if only a phone call – that will move you towards this goal?

These questions are very useful in preparing yourself for the “Doing Stage” of any project, and are useful when considering the move from Implementation to project Management and Administration on the Dragon Dreaming wheel. However, from long experience from Joanna’s work, I have frequently been saddened to learn how few of these projects conceived at the time are ever put into action. Something seemed to be missing. In fact the whole of the Dragon Dreaming approach can be seen as an attempt to “bridge the gap” and help these projects reach fruition.

Saint Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuit Order of the Roman Catholic Church, is reputed to have said “give me a child till he is seven and I will give you the man”. Freudian psychology has tended to make the same claim, asserting that our personality cannot be changed after that date, as it has been fixed immovably during the first seven years. This claim, that we are powerless over our

nature is denied by experience which shows that we can have a choice, so long as we observe the following conditions.

1. Firstly we must remove ourselves from our everyday environment – as it is this environment that holds our behaviour in place and reinforces existing behaviours.
2. Secondly we need a space in which we can reflect critically upon our past, connecting us with our ancestors, and the forces that have moulded and shaped us to be who we are.
3. Thirdly we need to share emotionally powerful experiences in a trustful setting, experiences which enable us to reconnect deeply with our deepest selves, and can help identify those trigger points.
4. Fourthly we need to be able to make resolutions for the future, connecting with intentions which we wish to pursue beyond the time we are together, and which connect with our descendents.
5. We need appropriate follow-up. This is important as without this the other 4 factors are wasted. This happens because although the individual may have changed, the environment from which they have come has not, and within a very short time, they will find their intentions have been compromised and they are back the way they were and nothing will have changed.

Thus at the end of a Dragon Dreaming workshop I frequently make the paradoxical statement that although participants have been attending a Dragon Dreaming workshop, they have not been “Doing” Dragon Dreaming. It is important that participants understand the difference between “reading a map” and “walking the country”, or between “reading the recipe” and “cooking and eating the meal”. The Dragon Dreaming Course is a course in map or recipe reading. The real Dragon Dreaming starts with actually undertaking a project in the real world. It is here that the real learning starts. This lies in the process of the “Doing” of Dragon Dreaming – not in dreaming about it, planning it or celebrating it, although of course these processes are important.

Management and Administration of a Project is the threshold which carries the project through its Implementation phase and ensures that the implementation stage of the “Doing: Acting Locally”, works effectively and efficiently. This stage acts as the “planning of the doing”, and acts to allocate personal, human and financial resources in such a way as to achieve the goals set for a project, minimising stress and using time effectively and efficiently. Like all aspects of Dragon Dreaming, Management and Administration is a fractal process, incorporating the entire wheel. It seeks to answer a number of important questions for example :

1. DREAMING

WHY – should this work be done? How does it contribute to furthering our overall dream?

WHO – should be involved? Who are the stakeholders in these activities?

2. PLANNING

WHAT – works best? What spiritual, mental, physical, or financial resources are required?

HOW – should the work be done? What are the best processes for this part of the project?

3. DOING

WHEN – is the work required to be completed? When should it start?

WHERE – should the products of the work be delivered? Where is the work best done?

4. CELEBRATE

DID IT WORK – did the answers to the above question lead to a quality product delivered in sufficient quantity to make the difference hoped for? Was this celebrated?

IS IT SUCCEEDING – in its impacts upon the environment, the individuals engaged and all stakeholders and participants? How was this communicated?

Unfortunately, largely due to Schools of Business Management throughout the world, Managers and Administrators often tend to seek to take over the entire organisation of the project, taking over first the planning, and then the vision building and skills development roles, but rarely effectively encouraging Dreaming or Celebrating within a project's structure. In Dragon Dreaming, this "takeover" by Managers and Administrators is to be resisted as it fosters highly hierarchical patterns of working, disempowering "subordinates" and creating coercive structures of enforcement and control. In such cases, the issue is a version of the ancient question of "who controls the controllers". Since the 1940s work of Kurt Lewin and his associates, for example, research has shown that such structures of authoritarian power often creates hidden resentment, which leads to unproductive workers when the authority is not present.

If we are to build true organisations based upon the principles of "win-win", new methods of Administration and Management are urgently needed that don't produce hierarchies of command and control. How do we create structures of supervision that do not produce hierarchies? One such organisation that has been highly innovative in this regard is Greenskills. Greenskills is a small non-government organisation in the South West town of Denmark in Western Australia, that has since 1989 proved to be a highly creative source of innovative projects aimed at "developing and managing environmental projects that assist all levels of our regional and metropolitan communities to effectively implement a vision for a sustainable future." Their "project management activities and training and employment programs aim to maximize the involvement of unemployed and underemployed groups, particularly youth and indigenous groups, as well as other disadvantaged groups and those seeking training and employment opportunities in more remote regional areas." Their mission is that "Greenskills is committed to the promotion and demonstration of sustainability by creating and supporting projects that inspire and engage local communities and by providing quality environmental training, employment services and career development."

Their management style has adapted a number of highly creative, not hierarchical methods for management and administration. Staff inservice meetings held on an annual basis are a cornerstone of this approach. It is at such meetings that some very controversial decisions get taken on a consensual basis. For example Annabelle Newberry, State Manager from 1998 to 2011 said "When I started, there was a flat pay structure, and all permanent staff were on \$15 an hour. Gradually varied pay levels were introduced, though there was some sense of regret about doing so. Staff would decide on pay rates and rises at (these) inservices, and sometimes we would decide against having an across the board pay rise because of concern about the financial impact it might have on the organisation."

Management is secured through all staff keeping timesheets that enables Greenskills to work out the real costs attached to each project, including holidays, sick leave, superannuation and workers compensation. Time off in lieu of pay is paid for additional hours worked. Permanent staff within Greenskills in 2008 earned between \$15.49 per hour (basic pay) and \$29.06 for a Project Officer Level 3. This is very low and reflects in part the different levels of responsibility of workers. Casual or temporary staff get paid at a slightly higher rate reflecting the greater insecurity of their work. To run two offices cost about \$63,000 a year, with a further \$108,000 for organizational costs, including vehicles and insurance.

Another was a highly innovative supervision approach adapted from Cocounselling, a reciprocal form peer counselling that uses a simple method of a refinement of "you tell me your problems and I'll tell you mine". All staff, and volunteers working at Greenskills were encouraged to have one supervision session once a week, and no account was made of the organisational hierarchy or the position the participants held in the organisation. Time is shared equally between participants and the essential requirement is that each person takes their turn in the role of as a silent counsellor. This person does their best by deeply listening. Practicing "Pinakarri", giving their full attention without comment to their partner, is an important tool for those seeking to adopt this approach. There is no discussion in Cocounselling; the aim is to support the person to work through their own issues in a self-directed self discovered way.

Harvey Jackins, a controversial figure from Seattle, Washington, began what he called Re-Evaluative Counselling in the 1950s, and it spread through to alternative and countercultural groups in the 1970s. Jackins had been a member of the Communist Party of the USA in the 1930s but was later expelled for failing to follow the Stalinist line in supporting the USSR. He discovered the approach when efforts to help co-workers as a local union convenor had failed until one day a Trade Unionist repeatedly cried and then felt better. After attempting to stop him crying, Jackins relented and just listened to him cry, finding that his condition and life improved thereafter. Greenskills participants have taken and adapted this approach to project supervision, where they arrange to meet regularly in pairs, for about 1 hour to one and a half hours each week to give each other peer-to-peer counselling, in turn taking the role of counsellor and client, with between half to three quarters of an hour of time allocated to each participant. In Greenskills their approach has taken over the role of hierarchical supervision in a top-down fashion, where the person in the role of counsellor acts a facilitator to their partner, sometimes as third-party observer and sometimes as second-party confidant, supervising the managers as well as those engaged in other duties.

In Greenskills their Cocounselling supervision occurs outside of the formal Greenskills organisation offices, as trust and safety (in the sense of reducing risk) is central and the sense that a co-counselling session is a safe space is important to the methods. This is also ensured by the fact that the counsellor may not talk later about a participant's session without explicit and specific permission by the participant. This "peer relationship" contributes greatly to the building of necessary trust for the session.

Sessions are also always open to the possibility that powerful emotions may arise. As with all work on Dragon Dreaming these are honoured and respected. Emotional capacities have arisen through

hundreds of years of mammalian evolution, as they give us access to information that is not available in any other way. A belief in the value of working with emotions has become a core focus of the approach. Co-counselling training emphasizes methods for accessing and working with emotions, and co-counsellors aim to develop and improve emotional intelligence and competence through the practice.

In Dragon Dreaming these approaches to supervision, management and administration are based upon the theory that it is distress patterns, largely inherited from the past that limit our effectiveness and prevent us achieving our full potential as human beings. For example, when people experience pain, the first thing they do is to hold their breath, to force it or control it in some way. Immediately afterwards, there is an attempt to withdraw attention away from the painful experience, as though by so doing they can “externalise it” making it “outside the self”. Humans then try to find a label to explain the pain. This label then replaces the experience, and is associated with a movement away from the “here and now”, flipping either into the past, trying to find how one got into the painful experience, or into the future, seeking a way to escape from the pain. Finally an emotional tension becomes stored somewhere in the body, as a specific muscular tension, a place where a set of muscles are sustained in a state of semi-permanent contraction, that make relaxation difficult. Sometimes carried for years, such tensions restructure the body, as muscles held in permanent tension get eventually replaced by fibrous cartilage and are then unable to relax at all. Elderly people often become stooped and their bodies twisted as a result of such unresolved tensions.

To become more effective we need to be able to reprogram this learned pattern of responses, which needs to be changed. These patterns are driven by the accumulated consequences in the body-mind drawn often of deeply buried memories of past events in which the person was unable to express or discharge the emotion or deliver a communication appropriate to the event at the time. The “Pinakarri” process of Dragon Dreaming, by connecting firstly to the Earth that gives support, and focussing awareness upon a relaxed conscious breath, allows us to find within our body the sites where energy is high as a result of a muscular contraction, can lead to a spontaneous release of such deeply buried pains, improving our effectiveness in being able to be present in such circumstances, without mental judgementalism or inappropriate evaluation. When such mental patterns cannot be discharged, a deeper technique may be required. The partner may ask “where in the body does the pain, or energy seem to be blocked?” Giving a colour, temperature or texture to this energy may be helpful. Focussed awareness to the “central nucleus of cells” from which the feeling emanates can lead to the discovery of an emotion behind the feeling, similar to hearing a strain of music heard at a distance. Such feelings are also usually linked to memories. It is helpful to discover the memory chain of such emotions, pursuing the chain back to the earliest recollection of such feelings. A careful and empathic counselling session will help uncover what was the undelivered communication at the time. Letting the person know that the adult partner can hear the message of the child within (even though those at the time could not) and making a safe space within for the hurt child, who can now rest with the knowledge that the message has been delivered, can powerfully aid in the relaxation of the tension and a sigh of release.

The “Pinakarri” thus works deeply by reprogramming the automatic consequences of painful experiences; rather than holding the breath, you breath relaxed and consciously, rather than withdrawing awareness from the experience you focus awareness upon it, rather than labelling the experience, you stay focussed upon the feelings, rather than flipping out to the past and future, one stays focussed upon the here and now, and rather than storing muscular tension in the body, you find where that tension is located, consciously relaxing and using the breath as a “release valve”, breath it out to the world. Such cathartic discharge may include crying, warm perspiration, trembling, yawning, or laughing where in day-to-day life, these "discharging" actions may be limited by social norms, such as, for example, taboos around crying found in our own and many other cultures. The theoretical base for this work is that in suppressing what we call negative feelings, we also suppress positive ones to. Living in emotional flatland not only limits our effectiveness it robs us of vital living energies; energy needed to make a change to the conditions of our world. It is no accident that Doing this will temporarily silence the inner judgemental voice and make the hearer able to be fully present in the situation of supporting their partner in a Cocounseling session.

CONCLUSION

At every training session of Dragon Dreaming therefore, in order to assist people actually in the doing of their project, it is important to have a peer supervisor or “buddy” with whom you maintain contact once a week.

Meeting at a mutually agreed time and place I encourage people to make use of the following questions, using a Cocounseling method with their partners.

1. DREAMING
 - a. What did you hope to achieve last week? Did you finish it? If not should this work still be done?
 - b. What extra work do you hope to have complete by the end of this coming week? How do these activities contribute to furthering our overall dream?
 - c. Who should be involved? Who are the stakeholders in these activities?

2. PLANNING
 - d. How will you involve those who are most involved?
 - e. What spiritual, mental, physical, or financial resources are required for you to achieve your goals?
 - f. How can you best get these resources? How should the work be done? What are the best processes for this part of the project?

3. DOING
 - g. By when is the work required to be completed? When should it start?
 - h. How might you try to sabotage, distract or stop yourself from achieving the tasks you have set?

- i. How can you best resist the temptations? Where should the products of the work be delivered? Where is the work best done?
4. CELEBRATE
- j. Did the answers to the above questions last time lead to a quality product delivered in sufficient quantity to make the difference you hoped for? Was this celebrated? How?
 - k. Is your project succeeding in its impacts upon the environment, the individuals engaged and all stakeholders and participants? How was this communicated and celebrated
 - l. When and where can we meet next? How do you feel now? Is there anything else you need?

A simple tool like this will not only overcome the problem of the forgetting curve. It will help bridge the gap between the theory of “learning about” Dragon Dreaming, it will help sustain you in the doing stage. It gives all participants the opportunity to really walk their talk, engaging in truly making their dreams come true, in a powerful and stress free way.

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Upon these skills, the action the individuals involved take is an exercise of *discerning wisdom*. This discernment is an act of non condemnatory judgment, which is required in every successful project. Unfortunately judgment today has a bad name as it has become associated with control and coercion, of the powerful supervising and assessing the powerless. Supervision in fact means “oversight”, and is required by everyone, in order to ensure that they feel satisfied about what is occurring. In actual fact the most successful projects are those characterised by “peer supervision”, in which everyone, even project coordinators are supervised, possibly even by their staff or volunteers. The way this peer supervision may occur is by a regular contact, perhaps weekly, perhaps once a fortnight, on a friendly, informal basis, considering “one-to-one” the following questions;

“What have you been doing this last period?”,

“Has it been successful?”,

“What could have been done to ensure it was more satisfactory for you?”,

“What do you plan doing for the next period?” and

“Are there any difficulties you foresee at the moment?”