

Guidelines for Collaborative Global Sociotechnical Systems Design Discourse

Introduction

The Sociotechnical Systems Roundtable is a learning and development community focused on the evolution of the art, science and practice of organization design. Organizations are:

- Groups of individuals
- Social entities constituted by interacting roles
- Economic units that produce value and consume resources
- Productive systems that utilize technologies to create value
- Information systems that utilize digital communications
- Ecological actors that impact the human habitat

Productive organizations, however owned, work to achieve valued purposes and, therefore, need to be designed for both effectiveness and efficiency. Each of the above descriptions represents a particular point of view. Each point of view is a source of important truths and each is, of necessity, incomplete. The roots of STS are anchored in the necessity of jointly considering these many aspects of human organizations. In the Sociotechnical Systems Roundtable, (and as participants in our wider Global STS Design Network and ecosystem), we seek to integrate multiple perspectives in order to design effective, humane, productive organizations.

Learning & Development Community

The Sociotechnical Systems Roundtable (STSRT, or Roundtable) is a learning and development community. We welcome participants from a wide variety of disciplines, nations, and levels of experience. Productive organizations exist in many forms and structures across the globe. We invite participation by people experienced in management, labor unions, cooperatives, and organizational research.

As a learning and development community, we require a process for sharing diverse points of view that honors the contributions of each participant to the practice of organization design. We invite rich discourse and development of a variety of models, processes, and methods without competitive advocacy. Competitive advocacy undermines both learning and collaboration.

We recognize that an effective learning process is a necessary element in comprehensive organization design. As part of our practice, we offer organizations learning processes to create innovative and effective designs.

Process

The key to an effective process of sharing between perspectives is the recognition of the need for diverse points of view and the recognition that each perspective, including our own, is necessarily incomplete. That suggests some guidelines for mutual learning and development:

- We value diverse perspectives and recognize their necessity
- No particular perspective can claim primacy, i.e. that other perspectives are subsets. The imposition of one terminology or other, amounts to diminishing the relevance of alternative perspectives.
- We accept that diverse perspectives may not integrate readily into a comfortable whole. That is the challenge we face in organization design.

- Roundtable members value mutual learning and sharing, allowing each person to integrate that learning within their particular perspective. *We remain open to multiple perspectives.*
- We recognize that each of the various approaches to STS across the globe will evolve in its own organizational context and that is valuable to the whole.
- We strive for respectful inquiry, dialog, discussion, and codification of the knowledge base of our organization practice.
- We summarize and codify our learning from a *neutral* point of view, i.e. impartially respecting differences.
- We treat each other with respect and civility even as we differ on many points.

Integration

Organization design requires the integration of these many perspectives and the information they provide into a coherent basis for design decisions. We recognize the uniqueness of each organization, its cultural context, and its economic and social environment. Therefore, a rich variety of organizational solutions is welcomed.

Innovations

Members of STS RT and participants in our meetings will share the innovative methods and approaches they have developed to organization design challenges. It should be understood that others who find these innovations useful will seek to incorporate aspects of them into their own practice. The STSRT expects the following:

- Members should credit the originators of such methods when they incorporate them into their practice or include them in publications.
- Members, after crediting originators, should feel free to modify such innovations to fit their practices, terminology, and methods. This recognizes the legitimacy of multiple perspectives in STS RT.
- We all recognize that all of our methods and models derive from the work of others who preceded us. Innovations, however distinct they may be, emerge from the long history of organizational innovation since the original work on organizational choice.
- The STS RT is not a body that regulates the exchange of ideas among members and participants. *If a member feels that their contributions require intellectual property protections, they should copyright them and inform others of that copyright.*

Sociotechnical Systems Roundtable Values

The primary value shared by members of the Sociotechnical Systems Roundtable is the belief that work organizations, central to the lives of people the world over, can be humane and meet the needs of their members while being both effective and efficient. There are many ways to achieve that organization design objective.

*Finalized on Thursday, 15 March 2017 by Eli Berniker, Pierre van Amelsvoort, Pam Posey, and Pete Sorenson.
Submitted to the STS/RT Stewards on 17 March 2017*