

Practical Wisdom
A Retrospective for Jean Fuller
By Don de Guerre
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Jean's recent contributions to the Global STS Network include his integration of STS, Lean Manufacturing and Participative Design and his development of a management framework for managing new forms of work organization.

Grounded in practice with one of his clients, a global manufacturing organization he represents the best of us in achieving results. While he read extensively – there were not many publications in the field that he missed – he always simplified and grounded theory in practice. I remember many conversations in which, with a twinkle in his eye he would gently, always gently, ask a question that challenged my thinking and then he would provide an insight based on experience that I would keep.

He developed an approach using his modified version of the Viable Systems Model (Stafford Beer) to help managers learn how to lead a new form of work organization by practicing boundary management. Fred, Eric and our other elders were not very clear about how to manage self-managing groups. Jean found a practical answer using everyday language that worked over and over again.

Jean represented the best of us by quietly and consistently applying the best of socio-technical systems thinking and practice. I don't know how many organizations he helped adapt to the new organizational realities by designing new forms of work organization but they were many. Hans van Beinum once said to me that the trouble with action researchers, like Jean, is that they were too busy doing it to write about it. To get more detail on Jean's presentations, you can find some of them on our website. We can only wish that we had a record of all his successful projects including some of his recent eco-systemic projects such as the judicial system in Quebec or his work with the Dairy Farmers of Quebec. Of course, he also had an ongoing number of smaller clients in the community and social sectors often volunteering his spare time.

I met Jean at an Ontario Quality of Working Life Centre's practitioner's network meeting some forty years ago. I think he was working for Domtar at the time and was an active trade unionist taking leadership in the network as one of the organizers and a keynote presenter. I immediately liked Jean and we stayed in touch through Centre activities. When the Centre was closed in 1988 and the practitioner's network ended, I only saw him at the annual Roundtable meetings when he and I were both able to be there and briefly catch up with each other. Perhaps Jean's biggest contribution was afterwards in the bar. I recall this huge man laid back with his arm around the next person to him grinning from ear to ear with a sparkle in his eyes saying "let's dance, c'mon let's go."

Jean loved his native Quebec and spent his life helping to develop work organizations in Quebec. It was only when I moved to Montreal that I really began to understand the depth and dedication of his work/life. Jean passed in his cherished Saint-Sauveur on Saturday August 29th 2020 after a long struggle with cancer. In recent years, he lived every moment radiating the joy and love of his recent bride Joelle, his 3 children and multiple grandchildren. He was loved and admired by many of us in the Global STS Network, appreciated for his many contributions but mostly just for who he was and how he was with us. A wise caring and reliable friend, he will be missed.