Toward a Social Network-Based Theory of Large-Group Interventions

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Finally, the study offers theoretically justified opportunities for improving the practice of large group interventions. "A Social Network-Based Theory of Large-Group Interventions" provides specific recommendations for the design and implementation of large-group interventions including decision criteria to identify key social network change levers, steps to accelerate the collaboration and buy-in of those involved, and tactics to evaluate the degree of change generated by large group interventions.
conceptualized and operationalized "A Social Network-Based Theory of Large-Group Interventions" using Dubin's (1978) eight-step theory building research methodology.

The theory generated by this study offers implications for large group intervention research and practice, as well as adds to the knowledge base of theory building research methods. Specifically, the study provided new theoretically-informed knowledge about what kinds of social network changes result from large-group interventions, under what circumstances these network changes occur, and how these network changes can generate organizational change. Researchers are also provided with theoretically-justified social network variables that could be used to operationalize Lewin's (1947) 3-Step Model of Change. Further, new opportunities to develop a mid-range theory of organizational change are presented through the social network perspective.

The study offers compelling evidence for understanding the limitations of applying Dubin's (1978) method to the development of new theory. The theory building research methods undertaken in the study exposed a critical shortcoming in developing a theory about a process. Dubin's (1978) methodology was developed during a time when social scientific research was focused on explaining differences between, rather than processes of. Consequently, Dubin's explanation of and methods for developing system states (e.g., theories in action) removed the process of change from the theory building process. Change, to Dubin, was moving from one system state to another, and his methods are not structured to explain movement between system states. Movement between system states was beyond the scope of theory building research at that time. This key finding offers future researchers a point of departure for future theory building research studies seeking to understand change processes.
ABSTRACT

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Increasing environmental complexity requires organizations to adapt and change at an accelerated pace (Burke, 2002). In response, organizations are employing new organization change approaches that promise more rapid, whole-system change (Dewey and Carter, 2003; Marshak, 2004). One such approach is large-group interventions (Bunker & Alban, 1992a, 1997, 2005). Large-group intervention proponents suggest that the methods are fast and effective because they engage greater numbers of organizational stakeholders, tap into the collective wisdom of the organization, and quickly generate broad-based commitment to change.

However, while large-group intervention practice is increasing (Worley and Feyerherm, 2003), many researchers contend that the theory underpinning large-group interventions is not adequately articulated (Austin & Bartunek, 2003; Bryson and Anderson, 2000; Weber & Manning, 1998). As a result, it difficult to say with certainty how large-group interventions work, in which situations they are appropriate, or how they might be integrated with other forms of organization development. This study was conducted to address this gap.

A social network perspective was adopted as an explanation for how large-group interventions work. In this view, large group interventions work because of the ability to restructure the networks of social relationships existing within organizations (Clarke, 2005; Garcia, 2007; Tenkasi & Chesmore, 2003). From this perspective, the study
BIOGRAPHY

Stephen K. Garcia is a research practitioner. His research interests focus on organizational learning and change, social network analysis and theory building. Stephen is currently a candidate for his Ed.D in Training and Development at North Carolina State University and hopes to graduate in December, 2008. His dissertation entails developing a theory of large-group organizational change methods from the social network perspective.

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