

# The Theory and Practice of Making Adaptive Change

Don't adapt to change: change to be adaptive

A Practical One Week Course with Dr Merrelyn Emery

## Course overview

Our world is increasingly wracked by problems and crises ranging from climate change to mental illness as our organisations have failed to adapt to rapidly changing environments. In just about every community, culture and industry, this failure is leading to poor performance, even collapse. For example, in Australia the National Disability Services' (nds.org.au) 2018 'Annual Market Survey' of 626 disability care providers reported that the operating environment of the National Disability Insurance System is tough – 13% of providers have discussed closing their operations in the last 12 months.

Attempting to adapt to highly unpredictable environments caused by unstable value systems and amplified by factors such as the accelerating uptake of digital platform technologies, organisations are all too often running from one new change management fad to the next. However, organisations can have greater control of their destinies. They achieve this by using the highly acclaimed adaptivity methodologies developed by Professors Fred and Merrelyn Emery.

By attending this intensive and participative course, you will learn the basics of the well-established theory of Open Systems Theory (OST), its key concepts and principles and their translation into methods that produce *continuous adaptation*. Although the course is challenging, it is designed to maximize understanding by deviating from conventional training courses.

## Course content

OST has been developed from integrated theory and practice which is why its methods reliably work. The course covers three major methods:

The *Search Conference* (SC) is for strategic planning as it answers questions like: 'Where do we want to be in the year X?' All organisations and communities today need periodically to take stock of themselves in their changing environment and plan more adaptive directions and futures. In addition, serious issues pop up so all relevant parties may need to come together to plan for example, a national emissions strategy to help keep the global temperature within the agreed international 1.5C degree rise.

The *Participative Design Workshop* (PDW) is to design and redesign organisational structures. It answers questions such as 'How do we organize ourselves to ensure we achieve our goals? To survive and thrive in business landscapes that are characterised by discontinuous change, organisations are transforming from rigid autocratic hierarchies to democratic systems where change and adaptability are natural and inherent. They consist of responsible self-managing groups of staff who are highly motivated to meet agreed outcomes such as productivity, quality, responsiveness and safety.

But most necessary activities in the world like complex and difficult decision making and problem solving are neither strategic planning nor structural redesign so participants will also learn how to design unique events and processes, *Unique Designs*, that utilize unique combinations of OST's many concepts and tools to achieve the desired purposes. Anything including such events as a two-hour meeting can benefit immeasurably from being carefully designed to achieve its purposes.

## Course process

This practical course is designed for those with a responsibility for making and understanding change, and for those who are interested in exploring a social science that actually works in practice and does what it claims to do. It also provides a framework within which other methods and tools for change can be evaluated and integrated.

It proceeds by way of briefings for hands-on experiences, those practical experiences and then debriefings of the theory the experiences demonstrate. The hands-on segments consist of experiencing the methods both as participants and as designers and managers of them. Participants bring their own real-life examples to practice on so they can see exactly how it would work at their place.

At the end of each major part of the course, there is a thorough Q and A where participants get all their questions answered so they can feel confident in their understanding. This is essential as the methods are not recipes but flexible demonstrations of concepts in action. Unique Designs are particularly demanding of theoretical understanding.

## Course outcomes

1. Understanding the basics of OST and how they translate into practical change on the ground.
2. The hands-on knowledge and skills to begin designing and managing participative methods
3. The practical knowledge to discriminate between effective and ineffective proposals for change

## Course dates and times

To maximise participant understanding of OST methods for continuous adaption, the course is designed around the following dates and times.

Friday 5 April	Saturday 6 April	Sunday 7 April	Monday 8 April	Tuesday 9 April	Wednesday 10 April
3pm to 9pm	9am to 9pm	9am to 9pm	9am to 5pm	9am to 9pm	9am to 1pm

## Course venue and fees

The course will be held the Travelodge Hotel Newcastle, 12 Steel Street, Newcastle West, NSW, 2302. P: +61 2 4926 3777 W: [www.travelodgehotels.com.au](http://www.travelodgehotels.com.au)

Fee per participant is AUD \$2,500 (plus GST). Early bird and group discounts apply. For further information contact:

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