

Client Information Leaflet (Executive Summary):

Sustainable organisational change with Large Scale Interventions

What is LSI and what is it used for?

Large Scale Interventions (LSI) form a participative approach for sustainable change with the whole system (organisation or community and its stakeholders). It is used to address compelling tasks in complex situations. LSI is used:

- For a faster and better implementation of change in the whole system
- To establish a feeling of ownership and stimulate self-management
- To enhance the capacity for change and learning in order to sustain change on the longer term

Although we should be cautious about promising to help solving complex collective problems, LSI can give direction to meta problems, a result that can hardly be attained otherwise. A well performed LSI produces “essentially by-products” (the ones you want but can’t enforce) as increase of trust, awareness, engagement and responsibility of participants.

Definition of LSI

The first thing that strikes when reviewing literature and talking to practitioners is that it is hard to say what LSI exactly is. The intervention is part of a wider family of participative approaches used to involve people in change processes. LSI itself embraces a rather diverse family of methods for working with Large Groups, the Large Group Intervention (LGI) methods, that share some basic principles. Each LGI method is consequently associated with the “founders” and comprises a fairly complex collection of concepts, procedures, tools, and techniques. Most methods require highly skilled facilitators.

Large Scale Interventions are also known under synonyms as Whole Systems Change, Whole System Working and Large Scale Change. For this guide the name Large Scale Interventions is used with this definition:

A Large Scale Intervention (LSI) is a trajectory for change or learning in which stakeholders of the whole system (organisation or community and its context) are invited to contribute at all stages of the trajectory. On one or more occasions, the whole system is invited into one room, to address strategic issues.

In this definition the interventions with (a representation of) the whole system in the room, the Large Group conferences or LGIs, are embedded in a bigger change process, the LSI trajectory.

What does LSI do?

LSI provides methods for balancing top-down and bottom-up decision-making. LSI comprises a trajectory with stakeholders contributing to the change process at all stages. On one or more occasions (a substantial representation of) the whole system is invited into one room, to work on strategic issues. The scale addresses the possibly large numbers of people involved. Large scale also refers to viewing change processes in the connection to their larger context. To be able to work productively with a large group (15 to more than 1000 participants) in the room a whole family of methods has been developed, the Large Group Intervention (LGI) methods. The best known LGI methods are Future Search, Search Conference, Open Space, World Café and Real Time Strategic Change (Whole Scale Change™).

The basic working principles of the LSI approach are:

- ❑ Systems thinking: dynamics in time and context influence the future of the system
- ❑ Participation of stakeholders: active participation enhances commitment to change, learning and working together
- ❑ Action learning: facilitates real time change because thinking and doing are not separated; the people who have to do the job are involved in the planning;
- ❑ Sensemaking: looking for common ground by sharing views and experiences; sustainable experience is created by engaging the whole person (head, heart and hands), because reality is defined by meanings as well as facts; basic assumption is that everything that lives wants to grow and flourish.

All LSIs share these basic principles. The combination of these principles produce a web of characteristics, the working elements typical for all LSIs (see figure 1).

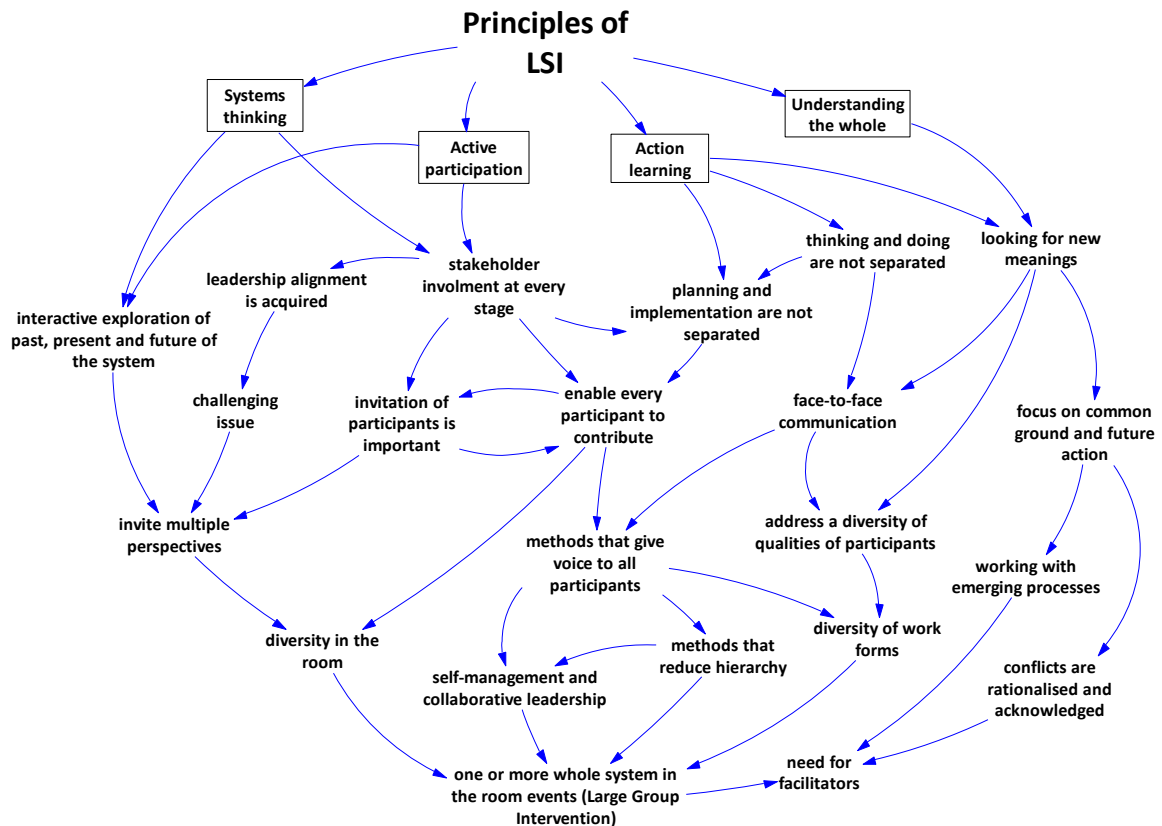


Figure 1: Characteristics of LSI

Before using LSI: assessment of preconditions

An LSI is a high-gain/high-risk intervention and should be applied carefully, when the task is worth the effort. It requires skilled facilitators and a client who supports the principles of LSI. Although success can never be guaranteed in complex situations, you can enhance the changes for success by assessing if pre-conditions are right by answering the next questions:

1. Is LSI the right approach? Success factors are:

- The task is important
- Stakeholders need each other to succeed with this task
- Complex, urgent or uncertain situation.

2. Are leaders willing to support LSI? Success factors are:

- Leaders are willing to collaborate, to share power
- Leaders are willing to spend time and money to do it “by the book”
- Political climate has enough trust to start.

3. Are the consultants skilled to conduct an LSI? Success factors:

- Consultants make a clear contract with the client
- Consultants manage expectations
- Consultants are skilled to work with large groups
- Consultants believe in the principles of LSI.

When not to use LSI

Do not use LSI if:

- The issue is not really important to anyone
- The task is abstract and likely to lead to talk without action
- Individual professionals can solve the problem
- One way information transfer is required
- There is no opportunity for change, due to lack of resources, energy, time, or lack of actual influence
- The political situation is highly charged and basic willingness to collaborate is absent
- An important stakeholder group cannot or will not participate.

How to use LSI

Success factors for effective design and performance of an LSI are:

- The Large Group Intervention (LGI) is planned as part of a larger effort
- Work with a planning group with a representation of stakeholders for all essential decisions regarding design, management and logistics
- Design of LSI and LGI is coherent with context, task, relations and directions
- Participants: getting the right people in the room for the LGI
- Representation: consideration to those who are not present; contact is supported by the larger social system
- LGI enables everyone's contributions by inclusiveness and building trust
- Divergence of perspectives: explore the whole before fixing any parts, engaging new connections, building a common database of the system

- Leadership is distributed by shared responsibility and self-management
- Convergence of perspectives: tapping into collective intelligence, looking for common ground
- Conference setting for the LGI facilitates the process, symbolizes the principles of LSI
- Action planning is done in the LGI, or soon after
- Reflection on conditions and principles with participants in the LGI, in everyday language
- Building of capacity to work participatory during the LSI
- LGI is managed well by facilitators
- Building of a post-event support structure, during the LSI a delivery system for change is made or initiated.

Reported effects

Short-term effects (LSI contributes to getting more and better work done) are:

- Short-term objectives are met
- Increased awareness and understanding of the system and context
- Commitment and energy for change, better implementation
- New relationships, more potential for innovation
- Some elements of LSI are transferred
- Efficiency is increased.

Sustainable effects (LSI contributes to transformed capability for changing and learning) are:

- Collective learning and changing continue, increased capacity to change
- Increased reflective self-awareness
- More permeable boundaries: opening up the organization, inviting diversity; focus on how good the system is; more systemic thinking
- New structures sustain ongoing participation in change
- Communication is more direct and constructive.

Reported risks

Like all interventions LSI can cause undesired effects, especially if not performed well. Reported risks are:

- Cynicism and greater resistance to change
- Loss of trust in participatory processes
- Apathy, people are awaiting further action of leaders to get relief of responsibility
- Frustration about lack of time or resources for follow up
- Only relatively minor, non-controversial actions are done
- Discouragement among people who were not invited
- Increased power game, increased distrust, decline of open communication
- Collusive climate, overemphasis of group interests at the expense of the personal affiliate.

The chart of figure 2 can help you assess whether working with LGIs matches the circumstances and goals:

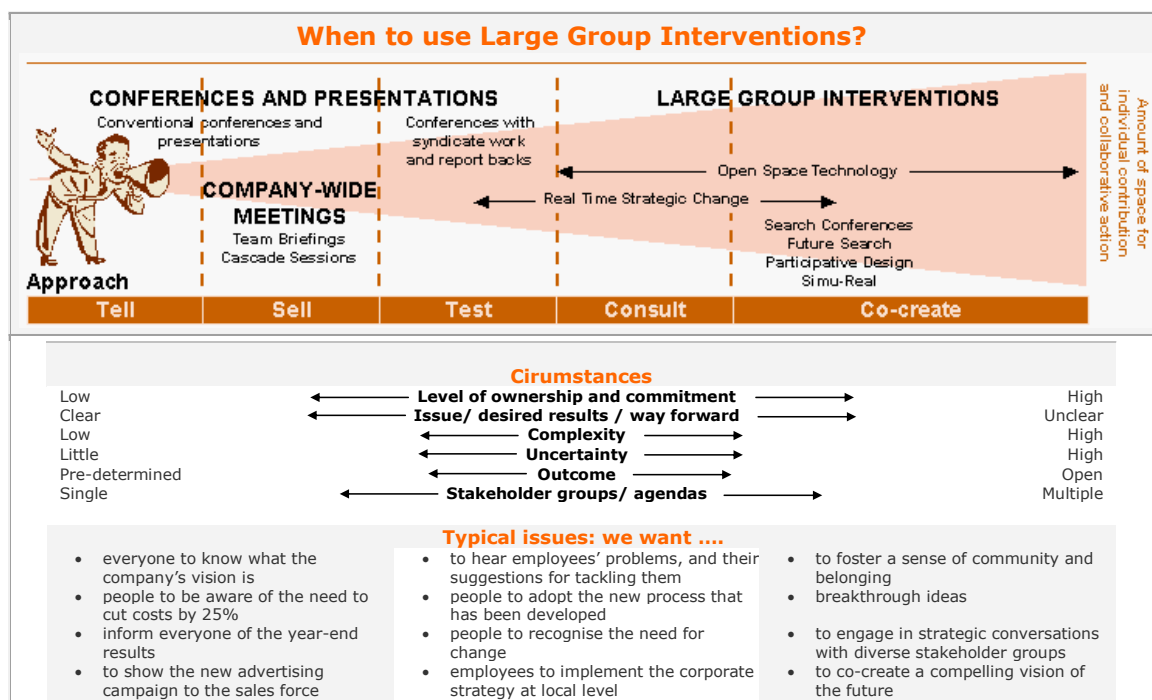


Figure 2: When to use Large Group Interventions?

Top-11 pitfalls to avoid

Pitfalls to avoid when working with an LSI are:

1. As a leader I already know what stakeholders think and want, I don't need to involve them in a change process.
2. As a leader I know what is best, a top-down approach saves time and money.
3. A onetime event should do it. Focus on the large group event and don't work on engagement and embedding after the event.
4. Make the intervention small scale: a short large group conference, no external stakeholders, a narrow defined task; a one-day event should be enough to change organising.
5. Raise high expectations and promise more than possible with the available time and resources.
6. Don't work with a microcosm planning group, leave it to the project manager and consultants.
7. As a consultant, take an expert role instead of promoting self-management: tell people what to do and in meetings work on the attitude of the group.
8. Invite or even force participants to work on a task that is not really important to them; a participative meeting is always a good thing.
9. As a consultant, don't work on leadership alignment; you already know what the ideas and intentions of (top)managers are; they will follow the plans of the participants automatically.
10. As a consultant , never say NO if a client wants an LSI, even if conditions are not right for an LSI; you never know what will happen, conditions can change, and commercial interests also count.
11. As a leader, hire facilitators only for the Large Group Intervention; don't involve facilitators in design and management of the larger process.

Further information

This summary is part of the guide "Building an evidence based guide to Large Scale Interventions. Towards sustainable change with the whole system" (van der Zouwen, 2011), see www.tonnievanderzouwen.nl/wiki. or order at www.eburon.nl In this guide you will find:

- A scoring tool to assess success factors and potential effects. This tool can be used to assess conditions *before* an LSI, and as guideline for design and management *during* an LSI.
- An impression of the LSI process in practice, provided by descriptions of three LSI cases
- A procedure with steps and tools to conduct an evaluation of effectiveness after an LSI
- Examples of how these tools work for a post evaluation of the three LSI cases

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