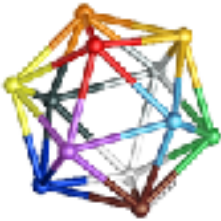# The Dynamics of Syntegration

Origins

Syntegration was invented by Professor Dr. Stanford Beer as an alternative to standard conference and group process approaches. He wanted a protocol where the outcomes were not predetermined by the sponsor or client, as is true of many group processes. Team Syntegrity Inc. (now Team Syntegrity Int. AG based in Switzerland) was established, in Canada, to take Syntegration to market even before Beer's book was published in 1994, *Beyond Dispute, The Invention of Team Syntegrity*. Since then thousands of Syntegration events have been delivered for all types of organizations in many countries and languages, in which participants have responded to an Opening Question posed by the sponsor or client. A team of trained facilitators and logisticians deliver Syntegration events. Participant evaluations are inevitably positive and demonstrate the effectiveness of the protocol in achieving novel and useful outcomes.

Syntegration, as invented by Beer, is a robust and collaborative means by which organizations can fully explore questions about how to balance issues relating to the future and environment with the needs of current operations, which is essential for long term organizational viability.

Syntegration Recipe
Ingredients

- Opening question as pretext – decided by sponsor- an example of an Opening Question is "What are our goals for next five years and what must we do to meet them?"
- Thirty or so people is ideal, but can accommodate from twenty-four to forty-two participants
- 3-1/2 to 5 days – standard is 3-1/2, 5 days includes Face Planning
- Preferably in residence – rooms for guests and for required meetings
- Delivery team with knowledge of the process - four facilitators including an organizer and 2-3 logistics support
- Laptops, printers, copier and related supplies
- Materials for binders – for output produced throughout the event
- Other logistics supplies – list provided by lead logistician
- One plenary room – space for all participants and delivery team to sit in circle, wall space available for posting output
- Two team meeting rooms – space for five team members, five critics and up to five observers, facilitator and two flip charts
- One logistics room – for creating output throughout the event
- Food and refreshments – healthy meals, refreshments available throughout

Instructions
Day one – half day – Involves all participants and delivery team members. Phases include Opening Plenary, Generating Statements of Importance, Problem Jostle, Hexadic Reduction, and Topic Selection.
Opening plenary - Sponsor sets the context relating to the Opening Question, and lead facilitator outlines the process and schedule for the event
Generating Statements of Importance – A brainstorming session where participants prepare short statements as their initial responses to the Opening Question. Post-it notes are used and statements are displayed on a wall. A statement is 5-10 words or so that express one idea. Each participant will likely prepare several statements

Problem jostle – A marketplace where Statements of Importance are selected for further description and clustered into like groups. Participants reflect their support for these aggregated statements by signing their name to indicate that a statement should be discussed in subsequent team meetings. Even though a participant may not agree with the statement, a signature means the statement merits further discussion. Once a statement receives five signatures it qualifies as a potential topic.

Hexadic Reduction – Aggregated Statements are reviewed, clarified if necessary, and consolidated into twelve topics for discussion. This completes the task of arriving at an agreed agenda for discussion during the subsequent days.

Topic selection – Participants indicate their topic preferences and an algorithm is run on a computer to configure the topic teams. Participants become members of two topic teams, critics of two other teams and observers of up to four topic teams. The algorithm optimizes the input of all participants to generate the topic allocations. Not everyone can have their first choices, but the groups are configured based on a values-free algorithm to achieve the best overall group result.

Day one – second half day and days two and three - Three iterations of twelve topic teams are scheduled according to the topic colours. Six rounds of two simultaneous topic meetings make one of three iterations.


Figure shows 3 iterations of 6 rounds of colour topic team meetings

Team meetings include five team members, five critics and a number of observers. Team members discuss their topic. During their allotted time, critics offer suggestions or play devil's advocate by commenting on the content and process of the meeting. Observers just listen and learn and can attend either or both of two topic team meetings. Team meetings generally last for 45 to 90 minutes based on the team meeting schedule. Team members discuss and prepare a statement about their topic which is subsequently posted for all to review. At the end of each iteration, all participants are encouraged to use graffiti to reflect their reaction to the developing statements, and coloured dots for visual applause are used by participants to reflect their support of statements.

Presentations and closing plenary

Brief presentations are created by team members at the end of each meeting and are shared with all participants in a plenary session at the end of each iteration.

Final statements at the end of the third iteration are the responses of each team to the Opening Question and are delivered in a final presentation of each topic during the Closing Plenary.

During the Closing Plenary, participants are asked to comment on their experience of the event and evaluations are completed and collected.

Human dynamics of Syntegration
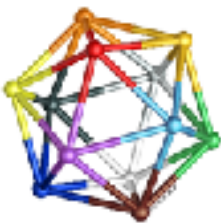
Architectonics – The Icosahedron shown above is the underlying structure of Syntegration. Thirty edges or struts represent the thirty participants and are identified by two colours designating two teams they will attend as team members. Twelve coloured nodes or vertices represent the topics, and 20 faces can be used for scheduling special planning activities. This creates a non-

hierarchical platform for participatory democracy. Equivalence is maintained such that every participant has an equal opportunity to influence the development of responses to the Opening Question.

Protocol – Participants create their own agenda based on the Opening Question. The agenda takes the form of twelve topics that are determined by participants. No idea is lost, but ideas are aggregated and consolidated into twelve topics. A computer algorithm is run using input about participant preferences creating twelve topic teams. Each participant becomes a team member of two topic teams, a critic of two other topic teams, and an observer of up to four topic teams. Each team meets three times to discuss their topics. By the time team members meet to discuss a topic for the second and third times, they have been involved in other topic discussions as critic or observer and so can modify their topic discussions based on what they are learning about the whole system. Participants often experience reverberation, which happens when an idea expressed in one topic meeting is brought forward by another participant in a different topic meeting. Resonance is created when all topic statements from a completed iteration are available for presentation and review as the whole system comes into view for all participants.

Outcomes – The protocol generates twelve statements that are responses to the Opening Question as the output of the Syntegration event. A benefit of the protocol is that it results in reaching the highest common factor rather than the lowest common denominator. The participants form an infoset through their shared experience leading to infosettic consciousness. The process generates a high level of commitment to the outcomes and a high level of rapport among all participants. Research shows that over 90% of the information generated during a Syntegration is shared by all participants by the end of the event.

Structural dynamics of Syntegration

Architecture – The icosahedron is the largest of the five platonic solids and is used as a model for the articulation of this group processing system. There are some features based on the geometry of the icosahedron that make it a robust form for the protocol. It articulates a three-away-from relationship between topics which provides the necessary degrees of freedom to capture the complexity of the 870 infosettic connections a thirty-person Syntegration generates. In addition to being a beautiful model in itself, there are other features which have supported other protocol developments. The golden ratio is expressed in the addition of polar opposite meetings where six people, who do not share common teams, come together in five teams. All twelve colours are represented in each polar opposite team and this creates an opportunity to share what participants are learning with one another through another organized set of meetings.
The model can be scaled up recursively to manage much larger groups and can also be used for smaller groups by reducing the number of participants and selecting one of the smaller platonic solids. For example, the Cubeoctahedron form is for groups of 24 people covering 12 topics over 3 days; the Diagonal Cube form is used for 24 people and 8 topics over 2 to 2+1/2 days, the Octahedron form is used for 12 people to deal with 6 topics over 1 to 1+1/2 days. These 'Small Forms' are useful for issues of lower complexity than a full 30 person Syntegration, but where all of the other attributes of equivalence and synergistic intergity are embraced.

Protocol – Colours are attached to nodes as the most values-free way of differentiating the twelve topics. The colour system helps participants understand how to move in the system as defined by their colours. Each participant receives a coloured badge that tells them what meetings they need to attend in what role and how to navigate the schedule. The interconnectivity of the teams enables information to flow freely throughout the process leading to reverberation and resonance as described above. A special optional phase of Syntegration adds Face Planning, where three-person teams come together to generate plans relating to three topics, producing another level of team commitment and setting the stage for outcomes to be implemented.

Outcomes – Using the Syntegrity Icosahedron to organize content and discussions generates a learning system for the infoset that is robust and comprehensive. It produces a high level of synergy while

maintaining the integrity of each participant – synergy + tensegrity = synergistic integrety = syntegrity, which is the heart of Syntegration.

Syntegration is the most efficient way of generating rapport and commitment for groups of about thirty – it shrinks massive content, as represented by the ideas of each participant, into chunks that can be managed by the topic teams. It compresses time. What would normally take months of meetings and discussions can be reduced to 3-1/2-to 5 days. Commitment to the outcomes results from the knowledge each participant has of how the outcomes were generated and aids in implementation after the event.

References

Beyond Dispute: The Invention of Team Syntegrity Wiley, 1994

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