

# Organisational Development as Energy Management

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## Introduction

At least as far back as the 1966 work by Katz and Khan, "The Social Psychology of Organisations", the essential descent into organisational decay and inefficiency, was observed as "an universal law of nature".

"Descent into decay is known to scientists as "Increasing Entropy", and this can only be reversed by expending energy. Despite later references in work by W. Warner Burke and others, the "energy" implications for O.D. practitioners are not widely explored or understood. This discussion attempts to redress the balance by translating scientific learning on energy and entropy into practical hints and tips to increase the understanding of energy management, and hence the success of O.D. activities.

Our aim in this paper is to give the energy management aspect of organisational development more of the attention it deserves.

## No O.D. = Decay

Without being conscious of it, we know that the world, the universe, "goes forward". We recognise that things run down, they get more spread out. All of these English phrases (and many more)

are captured by the grandly titled, "Second law of thermodynamics", that states that the universe is subject to the spreading out of energy, away from clumps and clusters, to an increasingly uniform, de-energised, and inactive flatness.

Entropy is used to measure the degree of run-down-ness of the universe, or any part of it. The fate of the universe is to reach complete uniform flatness, and thereby maximum entropy (FIG 1C). The universe wants to be totally flat and boring and every change that takes place is a small change to this end (when viewed in the grand scheme of things).

Now the universe being as big as it is (and that's very, very big) we can make part of it more energetic, more clustered and active by taking energy from a nearby part of the universe. In this way the entropy (run-down-ness) in our organisation can be decreased but this is only achieved by there being an overall increase in entropy.

To counteract entropy's effect in our organisation we must get energy from elsewhere (external to organisation) and/or make tough decisions about how to cluster and clump the energy we have inside the organisation. If we concentrate

energy in one area or process, without bringing extra energy in, then we consciously or unconsciously reduce energy clustering in another part of the organisation.

In O.D. we are in the business of organising people, so that, more (of what we want) is usefully done by less. We are fighting entropy. But that is okay. There are lots of areas, both within and external to our organisation, that can be raided to capture entropy fighting energy for O.D. So mobilising an O.D. activity is a process of clumping energy into the initiative (FIG 1A). We hope, by this route to improve our business or organisational processes so that we are more efficient or successful (FIG 1 B).

The point of this introduction is that any improvement is temporary – perhaps a new process that provides a better customer experience. Our organisations are subject to the law that says, "things run down" or, "decay is constant". We must constantly be trawling in energy and putting it to useful work in our organisation just to stand still, or better, make real improvements.

Examples that spring to mind that show mechanisms for this run down within an organisation are:

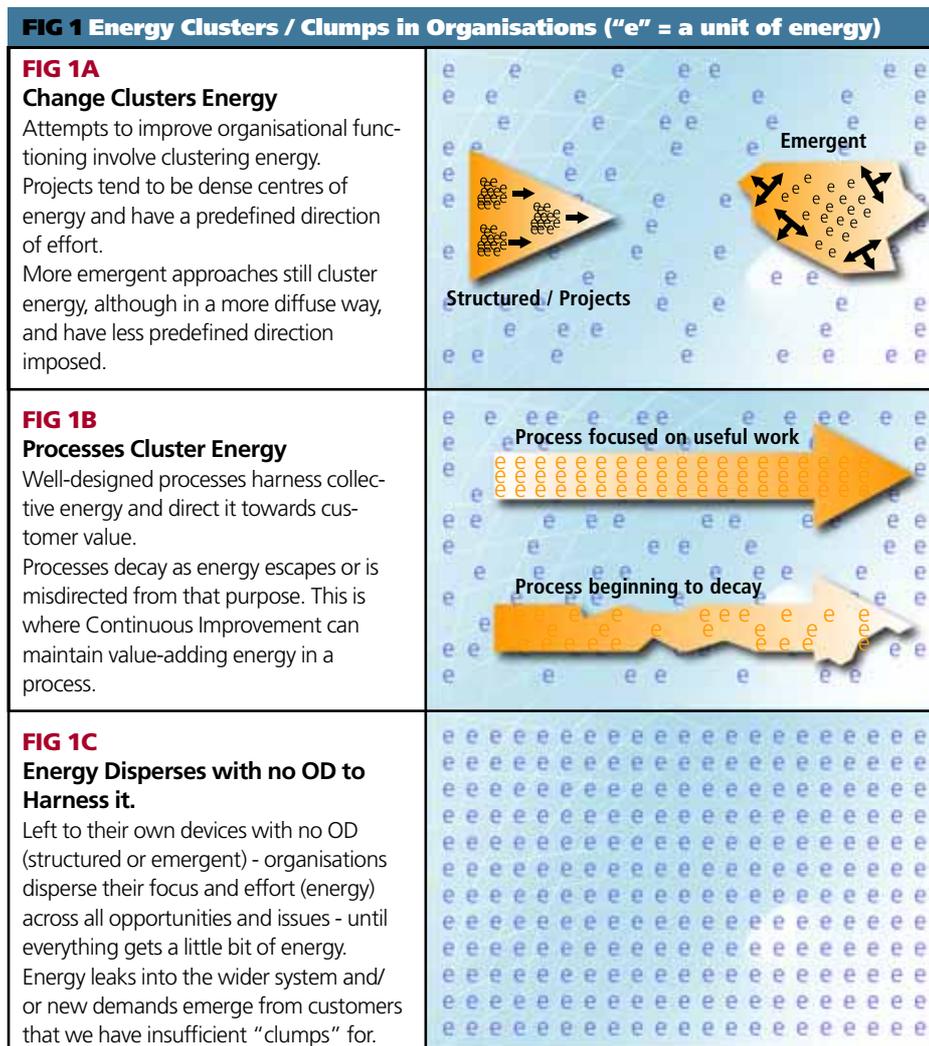
- People leave the organisation and take experience with them.
- The outside world develops constant piecemeal changes and clients or customers need new things, they become disconnected. New regulations require compliance.
- People take short cuts in their work that may be usually (but not always) okay.
- Employees can go into "coasting" mode once proficiency is achieved.
- Hardware, equipment and technology wears out, runs down, or malfunctions.
- Our whole environment changes and creates new difficulties.

On the other hand, if we are asked to make a list of those mechanisms that spontaneously make the organisations more efficient and effective, we struggle to find one item.

## That is why → No OD = Decay.

So if we are to fight entropic decay through clumping and harnessing energy for organisational change, development and improvement – how can we manage this better?

The primary implication that comes from the view of organisational development or change as an energy management activity, is that **any significant development will require large inputs of energy, if it is to be successful.** This is the common experience of practitioners we feel, but nevertheless, the clarity of explanation should still add value to the mobilisation of improvement activities. The following



type of questions are prompted –

- Does the leader/sponsor of the initiative have enough personal energy to give to this?
- Do the agents of change and development, bring focussed energy to this?
- Can we corral sufficient energy from the line people involved, to put into to this?

Indeed, the common question which often arises when “yet another” development activity is mobilised, of, “How much can we take on?”, is answered by, “As much as all concerned have energy for!”.

### Build Potential Energy → Release as Kinetic Energy → Capture as Useful Work

We propose a three stage model for energy management within Organisational Development.

- Build – of potential energy
- Release – as kinetic ( movement) energy
- Capture – as useful work, that we apply to decrease the entropy of our organisation

#### Stage One: Building Potential Energy (PE)

This is the process of changing the mindset of individuals, from being unaware of any need to change and improve, through to that of acceptance of the proposed development and the individual’s role in the future. i.e. logical persuasion.

The activities undertaken in this stage possibly include involvement, discussion, presentation, planning and evaluation.

There are many ways to build up Potential Energy (PE), OD practitioners know them well, although they may not always think of them in energy terms –

- Having a wide range of the people impacted conducting research into issues and opportunities i.e. wide involvement in diagnosis
- Open and transparent sharing of findings – not edited for, or by, management
- Having the leaders explain directly to people the information available and invite discussion of the implications
- Ensuring local team leaders are involved and can therefore discuss with their teams to create meaning and generate possible ideas for both solutions and implementation approaches
- Organising groups to visit other organisations for comparison and learning
- Educating groups on new approaches and possibilities

– Essentially these processes are good old education, communication and involvement activities, repeated until sufficient acceptance is realised.

In estimating the energy requirement for the above, we have borrowed the Potential Energy (PE) formula from physics to inform our thinking.

$PE = m * g * h$  where

**m** is the mass

**g** is the force (gravity)

**h** is the distance over which the force operates

How could this translate into OD terms, when applied to individuals or organisations?

“**m**” represents the mass of the people to adopt new behaviours, in the sense of the number of people involved. The mass of people for any particular development is a given (but is often not understood, with many affected people not identified). It is what it is.

“**g**” represents the compelling force (of argument) or pressure (from the organisation) perceived by

the individuals involved. Note that this is the perceived force of argument by each individual, not (necessarily) the same as the perception of the giver of the message. We’ll translate this “**g**” into OD terms as “**f**” (= force of argument)

“**h**” represents the contact time over which the force or pressure operates. A way of expressing this could be amount of “contact with leadership”. By “leadership” we mean any agency that is influential in changing the mindset of the individual concerned. We’ll translate this “**h**” into OD terms as “**c**” (= degree of contact with leadership).

This gives us the OD equivalent formula for calculating Potential Energy to reach acceptance stage as

$PE = m * f * c$ , where

“**m**” is the mass

“**f**” is the force (of argument)

“**c**” is the degree of contact with leadership

Maximising the PE built within the target audience, requires each of the factors above to be maximised.

The emphasis during this stage is on logical rather than emotional approaches. “**m**”, the mass of people, is a system specific constant for any change being undertaken.

So we are left to maximise “**f**” and “**c**”.

The force (**f**) of the message is a combination of the urgency of the issues felt now, or about to be experienced, combined with the attractiveness of an envisioned desired state, and even, if known at this time, the practicality and suitability of the solution.

The role of the force of argument is usually well understood and appreciated, so the contact factor (**c**) becomes of key interest.

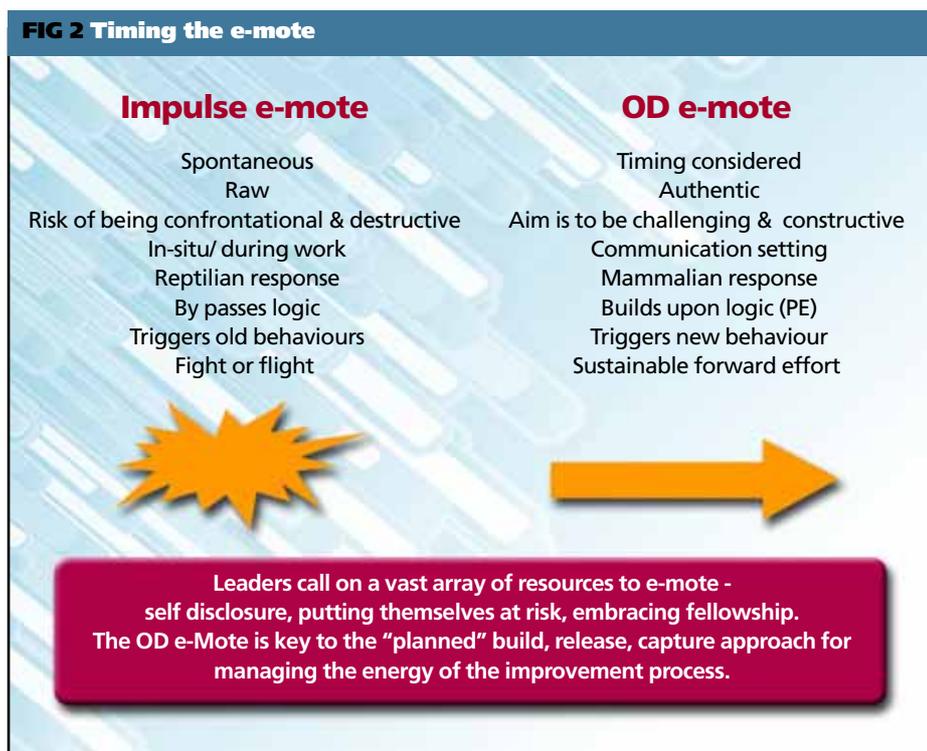
It is our experience that within the “**c**” factor lie two key aspects.

The first is the degree of influence of various leaders that come to bear in changing people’s understandings and convictions.

The second is the quality of, and the nature of the way in which influence is brought to bear. Face to face discussion with someone respected, in-charge, enthusiastic, committed to the change, and at personal risk from failure, rates a very high “**c**” value. Impersonal communication from someone ineffectual, not respected, lukewarm about the development, and at no personal risk, rates a low “**c**” factor.

Leadership can be from executives, senior managers, and supervisors, but also from other thought leaders and influencers – such as trade union officials. Leadership can come from within via self- improvement. The factor “**c**” is therefore the total degree of contact with all forms of leadership.

Leadership then is the conduit through which



energy is captured and collected from outside the existing "energy pool" of the organisation. Leadership is the mechanism by which we locally reverse the downhill trend of decay towards maximum entropy.

### Stage Two: Release as Kinetic Energy (KE)

Once built to suitable level, Potential Energy needs to be released as Kinetic Energy.

"Use it or lose it", springs to mind.

As PE, nothing has yet happened, the performance of the organisation has not changed.

We need to release the PE as the energy of movement (Kinetic Energy). With KE we have the ability to do work, to make things happen. We see from the next stage how to capture Useful Work, but it is important that the mechanism for release of KE is understood for maximum efficacy. How then is release achieved?

Our observation is that release of PE into KE is achieved, person by person, by leadership revealing an **emotional** and **personal** path to the future for the individual concerned.

Leadership can come, as described earlier, from a number of different sources for any one individual. The key here is that leadership provides an emotional trigger – not logical. In most OD circumstances we would like the management structure to have a significant role in the building and release of energy. We would not usually like to leave to chance, the source of leadership for our employees, members and such. Almost by definition, the role of a management structure is to provide leadership.

### Emotional

There is now good scientific evidence from neuroscience (see references including "Descartes Error" by Antonio Damasio) that the decision to

act in a new, non-automatic way is an emotional event in the brain. That is to say, that the same parts (same circuits) that form the seat of emotions, form the seat of a "take new action" decision.

Different people require different amounts of energy build-up, explanation or convincer strategies to get to the point of taking new action, but that point, for all of us, is an emotional event. The converse of this is that taking new action is not a logical event, and cannot be brought about by logical argument alone.

### Personal

A person needs to see themselves, in the future, taking the new action. They need that connection to a safe and a better longer term environment, so that it is not a team, a company, or a group that is being drawn into the new behaviours, but themselves.

To release PE as KE, leadership must demonstrate that each individual has a role in the future and issue an invitation to the person to join that future.

Potential must be sparked into movement – we need to put our energy in motion: e-motion. We have used the word "e-mote" to describe the leadership trigger from PE into KE.

### Characteristics of e-motes include

- Setting the pace and direction of the change by managing own and others energy flow
- Believing 100% in the change, demonstrating confidence in the new way
- Fully and unreservedly modelling the behaviour change required
- Being passionate and convincing about change – walking the talk
- Praising and rewarding progress whilst not tol-

erating the old ways

- Demonstrating at risk behaviours - leading from the front, being exposed and in harm's way.
- Having the courage to disclose personal thoughts, including fears, about the change
- Understanding and supporting staff right throughout the journey

The way in which leadership triggers PE into KE (e-motes) is important for the achievement of our OD goals.

In particular we would like to trigger the Kinetic Energy at the right time, and in the right direction.

If we do this correctly, we can see things happening. As PE, the energy was not visible.

So how do we measure the Kinetic Energy required for any particular change?

Referring back to physics we find the equation that describes Kinetic Energy (KE) is,

$$KE = \frac{1}{2} * m * v^2 \text{ where}$$

"m" is mass, and

"v" is the velocity ( a vector quantity, speed with direction).

In OD our understanding of the factors is – "m" represents the mass of people, as before, it can be seen as sum of all the individual inertias, and "v" is speed and direction of change.

These factors are readily translatable in OD terms and need no translation

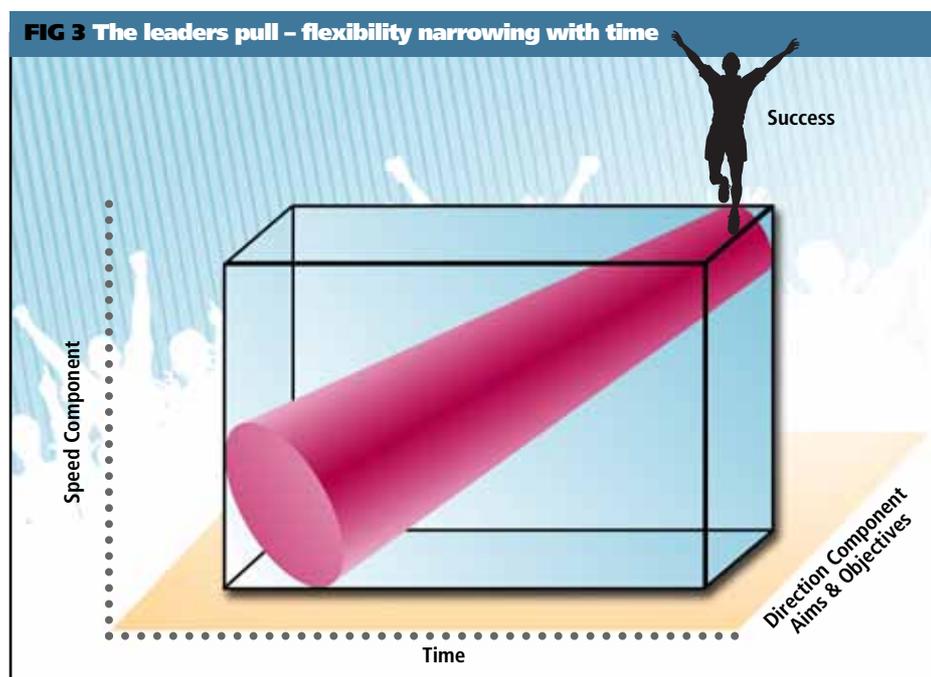
### The Right Time

It is a common human experience that timing is important. An e-mote from a leader that works fine today may be woefully wrong in a week's time. Equally an e-mote made too early may get the wrong response. One comparison that can be made is between the "Impulse e-mote" and the "OD e-mote" (see FIG 2). We would seek to ensure that the Kinetic Energy triggered is constructive.

There is a growing trend in organisations today to promote authentic leadership, as described by Bill George and others. In extremis, the reckless overly self focused leader, *in the spirit of authenticity*, can indulge in a series of impulse e-motes – potentially wrong place, wrong time and certainly wrong effect for planned OD.

"In 6 months time half of you won't be here" – we have heard a leader splutter out to an audience when getting annoyed at questioning at the very introduction of an organisational redesign project. At that stage the context and eventual outcomes of the project were, in reality, unclear. The result of the reckless comment was anger, guardedness and commencement of a nightmare project.

What we believe is required, is an authenticity, with as much emphasis on self discipline and personal mastery as individualism. This creates the



genuine, purposeful expressions of leadership, that disconfirm the current state, connects people to the future, and reduces anxiety by clarifying the Useful Work to be done.

When the time is right and we have built PE, in readiness for action, with clear plans for the useful work to be done, then leaders can “e-mote” the movement to action in the right direction.

**The Right Direction**

The second key aspect of the leadership e-mote, is that the movement and energy triggered be in the right direction. This is another way of saying that we expect our leaders to know what they want us to do.

We want direction and a sense that we are pulling together. The danger is that if this is absent, the energy of motion will be dissipated, different actions cancelling each other out and not being converted into Useful Work.

The risk is that the motion once triggered will be in some uncontrolled direction, at best irrelevant, but at worst, counter-productive. The lesson is that leaders should have tasks ready to be undertaken when e-motes release movement (see FIG 3). We would like leaders to pull people into the future (not just push people out of the past). We want our leaders to have a vision of where we are going, and draw us towards it.

It is the fact that “v” is squared in the equation ( $KE = 1/2 * m * v^2$ ) that makes such an impact on the outcome of releasing PE as energy in motion.

The speed of movement in the new direction is only set by the square root of the PE released (even with no waste). If you think about the maths of this, it means you only get a small amount of action in the right direction, for (relatively) a lot of built up Potential Energy. If you halve the investment in building P E, you will only get a quarter of the velocity.

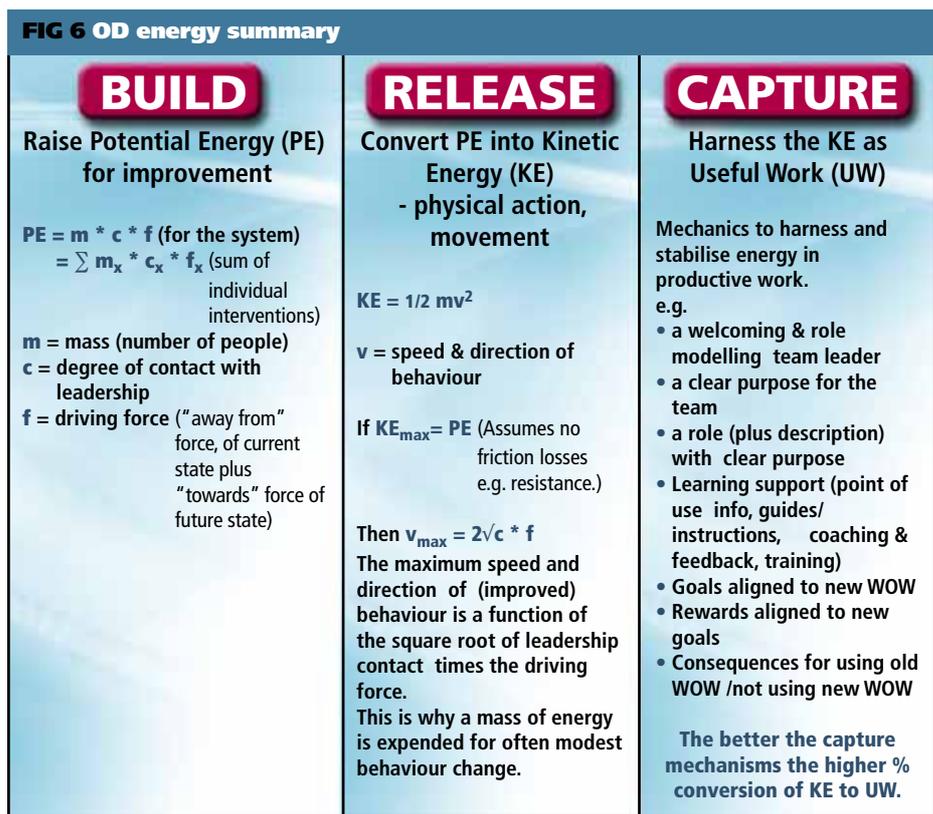
This observation, nevertheless, corresponds to most experienced practitioners own memories of significant developments. You need a lot of involvement, argument, learning and get a good release of energy via leadership, for modest progress in the adoption of new ways.

The capture mechanisms are like a narrowing cone pulling the energy in the right direction at the right time, accepting some deviations for necessary learning and experimentation. The cone in Fig 3 in effect represents the boundary of useful timing and direction, wider at the start of the journey than the end.

**Stage Three: Capture as Useful Work (UW)**

We are off and running!

We have built up energy driving a strong logical interest in the development, e-motion has finally been sparked, released by some leader-



ship craft, and here we are running about towards the future, doing new stuff that has been shown to us by leadership.

We want to work in this new result-centred process, and stop doing work that no one values or wants any more, but maybe ...

- We still have our old boss wanting the old things, we don't yet have a new team leader who will welcome us to the new world
- The new ways of working are not ready, or in place
- Even if the new ways are theoretically ready, we can't find another tribe or even another soul who is using them...we knock on doors, talk to people, ask for access to new systems and data but can't quite get access.

To capture KE as Useful Work (UW), we need to have the necessary solution components of the change or improvement ready, and available to be used. It sounds so obvious doesn't it!

How do you trap, corral or contain energy in motion – so that it does the right things? Design components of the solution, such as new processes, procedures, new team leaders and teams, induction/ orientation training, on the job help, coaching on job, measures and targets are all designed to capture the Kinetic Energy released, as Useful Work.

Yet frustratingly we still see mistimed or counter productive energy release – with individuals and groups going off like firecrackers, fizzing out and coming to rest in the same spot but with no fuel left in the tank.

With each energy build and release – we have to know the UW that is to be done and we must

have put in place capture mechanisms that form the components of the new solution to harness the energy.

Perhaps the key point at the stage of “capture as Useful Work” is that it is at this stage that we change the organisation and improvements happen. We should therefore plan backwards from these tasks to ensure stages one and two build up to the work that needs to be done. We should not simply launch into involvement and explanation campaigns regarding the brave new world (necessary as these may be) without knowing what sort of tasks the energy generated will be used to accomplish. It's planning.

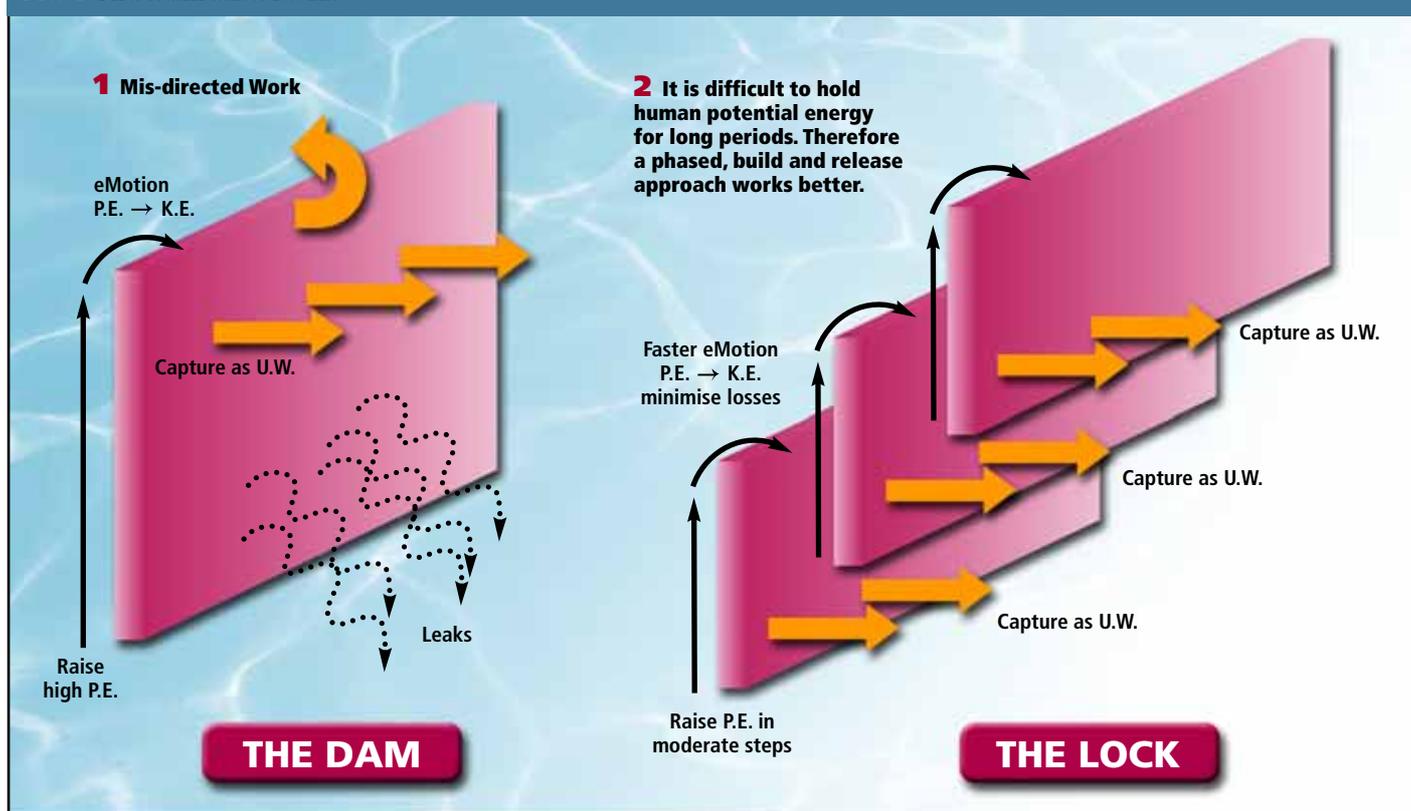
**The Framework for Using The Three Stages (The Staircase Locks not the Dam)**

A major problem is that as we build Potential Energy, it is prone to leakage. Energy, once built, drains away. That energy can be sparked in small clumps towards misdirected efforts, even contrary to the actual intended improvement. High states of readiness cannot be maintained for long periods.

Therefore, we propose that an energy management plan for OD should apply multiple layers of “build, release, capture” to avoid large energy losses – as well as frustration and misdirected efforts.

We think of it as creating a canal staircase or lock system for energy, rather than building a dam and raising a massive leaking body of energy (see FIG 4).

An OD plan that uses multiple iterations of “build, release and capture” takes more plan-

**FIG 4 The Staircase locks**


ning, but is far less wasteful of energy.

An OD plan that attempts a “big-bang” change from the old to the new, is more risky and more wasteful of energy, and may in fact require an impossibly large build up of Potential Energy for success. The dam approach risks both leakage and an uncontrolled damaging explosion of energy.

These multiple iterations of “Build, Release and Capture” may be termed “releases”.

#### Framework Fundamentals

- Use multiple releases.
- Plan around the tasks to be done as “Useful Work”, in each release.
- Work backwards to plan to build and release energy to achieve the goals of each release

#### For Example

In the early phases, these mechanisms to capture energy as Useful Work may be basic allowing wide range of valid actions –

- Release 1: We have a new team leader or expert, who is supportive and somewhat versed in the new ways, we can go to them.
- Release 2: We have a new process that we will practice using with selected customers and review the results with our leader.
- Release 3: We share all the best practices we and other groups have found and create a user guide.

Then the mechanisms become more constructed narrowing the range of UW –

- Release 4: Armed with these early experiences and user guide we help test the new IT system that supports this improvement, we make some adjustments to help the system serve us better overall and we get bugs fixed.
- Release 5: We plan locally to transfer all our customers to the new way over a period of time.
- Release 6: We agree new KPI targets for the process with our team leader and other inter-dependent teams.
- All throughout the release history, we track our progress, refine our approach and constantly monitor and tweak our performance, to reach our aims and objectives.

The point is the capture mechanisms gradually narrow down the focus on what is the successful outcome for the endeavour. They form an energy conserving container through the life cycle of the OD journey just like the cone in FIG 3.

#### Planning in Energy Terms

There are many basis for planning OD work – all have use and validity depending on the nature of the situation, the organisation culture etc. We offer the following simple planning table (FIG 5) as a way to consider the OD plan in terms of the build, release, capture, energy management cycle.

The idea is to consider –

- What is the Useful Work required from this release and how will it be captured? (Best to start here and work back in practice, avoids wasting energy.)

- What mechanisms will convert the energy to Useful Work?
- What groups need energising, starting when?
- When that energising build up will be stopped and how will the Potential Energy be released (leaders OD e-mote)?
- How the released Kinetic Energy will be utilised to spread energy further?
- Repeat for successive energy releases.

#### To recap

An OD initiative can be viewed in energy management terms. This energy is managed in three main stages.

- Build Potential Energy – a logical process building the mindset for acceptance for the need to change
- Release as e-motion – a spark from leadership that releases Potential Energy as motion i.e. Kinetic Energy and pulls others forward towards the new behaviour
- Capture energy capture as Useful Work – the conversion of Kinetic Energy into tasks to achieve the outcomes and aims of the improvement i.e. converted to Useful Work.

This is summarised by the diagram (Fig 6), OD Energy Summary.

We also propose a framework for planning major OD initiatives using multiple iterations of the three stages and planning back from the Useful Work stages, as in FIG 5.

FIG 5 Energy Planning Table

BUILD (PE)			RELEASE (KE)				CAPTURE (UW)		
			PE Cannot be held				KE is captured or wasted		
PE Campaign	Groups	Mechanisms	Start Time	End Time (Release)	Leaders	e-mote	Improvement Activities	Useful Work for Capture	Mechanisms
1	A								
	B								
	C								
2	A								
	B								
	C								

Involvement, communication and education activities

Which leaders will release KE in which groups, when, and with what e-mote means

What design, build, test activities will people be brought together for to build social support and transfer energy

Induction by leaders, training, use new processes coaching support etc.

**Practical Implications for OD Practitioners and Leaders**

- Energy is dispersing, diluting the focus and attention on customer value adding work – i.e. entropy is increasing and causing organisational decay
- Arresting decay means clustering, clumping energy to give focus, attention and effort to selected processes
- Whether the clustering is diffuse (more emergent approach) or more concentrated (structured programmatic approach) energy will need to be organised to some degree
- Leadership (formal and informal) and OD Practitioners are therefore seeking to cluster or clump energy to focus and give attention to opportunities and problems – this means choice about what becomes energy depleted
- For organisational development to occur massive amounts of personal energy must be input to the process by leaders and other agents of change.

**OD can seek to manage energy by considering –**

- Logic and intellectual stimulation builds Potential Energy
- Emotion releases Potential Energy as movement or Kinetic Energy
- Kinetic Energy has to be harnessed as Useful Work for value to accrue
- Large build up of Potential Energy is difficult as PE is subject to entropy – it leaks, it becomes misdirected, therefore phases of build → release → capture as Useful Work, is a better planning philosophy for OD
- It takes a huge amount of PE to convert to speed and direction of behaviour change, and even more energy is lost in the conversion to Useful Work IF the solution components aren't ready or fit for purpose
- Leaders need to learn to consciously inject OD e-motes at the right time (i.e. when PE is built and UW containers are ready)
- Similarly leaders need balanced authenticity where self discipline and personal mastery help avoid impulse e-motes, which waste energy and result in counterproductive un-useful work

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**Footnote: Maths Alert!**

We do use mathematical equations in this discussion. Perhaps an aversion to any form of maths has been part of the reason for the neglect of energy management. We do not use maths to prove anything, but only to say, "If this equation holds good in those areas of science (and it does), what could it tell us about O.D., and how might we use it to help our own endeavours?"

### Authors

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