P. Tuecke (2000)

Creating a Wall of Wonder with The ToP™ Environmental Scan

The Wall of Wonder is a poetic name given to a process more functionally named The Environmental Scan. It is often used at the beginning of a conference or retreat to set a context for strategic planning, or team development. The focus of the gathering can vary from that of the organization to a more diffuse topic such as the future of assisted living in a geographical area. For the purpose of simplicity of writing, this paper, I will use the organizational focus most of the time. You can substitute the words topic, issue, or focus of concern in most instances. It is a powerful way for a group to quickly become familiar with the history and background of their organization or issue. It provides an historical context for the sessions to follow. The participants can look toward the future with greater understanding of the events that have brought the organization to the present point. It functions as a way for the group to look at "where we've come from" before planning "where we want to go."

The Wall of Wonder is one of the many facilitative methods and techniques developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) in its work with communities and organizations over the past thirty years. In this paper I have written a general description of the design and process of this method, identified some results and benefits of using it, shared a brief story of its origin and development, and highlighted some of the dynamics that are foundational to this and other ToP™ methods. In the session on this topic we will demonstrate the process using the field of facilitation as the focus. Participants will become familiar with the growth of facilitation as a profession and the history of the IAF. They will experience the methodology as participants and then learn how to facilitate the process using detailed procedures. They will participate in discussions on the process and various applications.

The Design of the Process
The process utilizes variations of the ToP™ workshop method and the ToP™ focused discussion method to create and dialogue about a wall of events and trends in their shared environment. Participants brainstorm events from the past, present, and future in three categories: the global, the regional, and the local. The *global* represents the largest perspective needed for the conference. Most often it is "the world", but could be the largest geographical, political or professional unit of the people gathered. The *regional* category represents the general arena of focus for the work or concern of the group. This is often the industry, profession, state, county, or city. The *local* category involves the personal perspective such as the organization, company, department, community, family or self.

On the front wall of the meeting space is a chart framework with a timeline across the top and the three categories down the left side. The time span often reaches back into the past to the beginning of the organization or other appropriate starting point, and moves forward by years or decades as appropriate in to the future in an equal amount of years. The brainstormed events, written on cards, are placed on a timeline under the year or decade in which they occurred and in the appropriate category. The facilitator then leads the group through a series of questions that guides the group in discussing the events, the connections between categories and timeframes, the trends, and the significance of the data and relationships between them to the organization.

The design of the Wall of Wonder consists of

1. Individual and small group BRAINSTORMING events occurring over time in each of the categories, which are written on cards and placed on the timeline.
2. Observing CONNECTIONS between categories and exploring answers to a series of questions about the relationship of the information in each of the categories.
3. Looking over the entire wall and observing MAJOR SHIFTS that have occurred over time in each of the categories, and giving a title to each of the major divisions of the chart.
4. Naming TRENDS in each of the categories.
5. Looking at IMPLICATIONS of the TRENDS for the future of the organization, and reflecting on the learnings from the content and process of the exercise.
6. Giving an OVERALL TITLE to the "wall" that has been built with the memories, imaginations, and creativity of the group.

Results and Benefits
This powerful activity enables new members to get on top of the history and background of the organization very quickly. At the same time, "old hands" reconnect with the original vision that birthed the organization and that they carry within them. It affirms their perspective as it brings new people on board. When there is time to do so, it provides a marvelous opportunity for newer group members to hear the stories of the struggles and victories of the early days. Newer and or younger members bring their fresh perspective to the current years' events, events of the future, and discerning trends.

An Asian publishing group had just moved its headquarters out of Hong Kong and into their Manila office in 1996. New technology was changing the way they did their work and the potential for expansion by leaps and bounds. After a year in the new locale, there still remained a gap between the corporate staff from Hong Kong and the local staff from Manila, and between the old hands and the new hi-tech media experts. The owners engaged my company to facilitate a series of teambuilding sessions with the company. Key objectives were to integrate the newly relocated staff with the Manila staff, develop a clear understanding of the overall business process, and increase awareness of each individual's and each department's contribution to achieving continued success. We began our two-day session with the Environmental Scan that we called the Historical Overview of the Company. Long-term employees told about the beginnings of the company in the late 60's. They told fascinating and dramatic stories of the struggle for survival and later expansion against the backdrop of floods, typhoons, volcanoes, martial law and revolution. The energy in the room rose as the young, high-tech media experts heard about the vision and struggle for survival from the older print salespersons. Corporate staff got a different perspective on developments in the field. At the close of this exercise, the group had already begun to sense new connections among themselves, which began to establish the trust needed to explore together their mission, vision and business processes.

In experiencing this process it is, for some employees, the first time they have seen the big picture of the organization and how it grew out of the events in the past. This activity is often the beginning of a powerful story about the organization. They begin to see how the social

environment, the events and happenings in the world have impacted their lives and the life of the organization. People see connections between what is going on in the world, the field in which they work, and the organization they are part of. They discern relationships between events that occurred over time as well as current events. They weave the historical events into the fabric of the organization.

In working with a large department of a pioneer in the HMO field, I used the Environmental Scan as part of the orientation session for the participants. Here the participants pieced together the fascinating story of the birth of the company as an outgrowth of one of the structures supporting the huge workforce building the Hoover Dam. Titles of the various sections of the whole chart tell the story of the growth of the company as "A Journey From A Time of Control," when they were the only game in town, "Through A Time of Struggle," during the growth of competition, "To A Time of Partnership," linking with communities and organizations to provide customer-focused service. They noted the changes occurring in the events of the world impacting the business, both in their innovative past and in the current evolution of the highly competitive health care industry.

The Function of Enlarged Perspective
The Environmental Scan has been used with communities and with interest groups. The dynamics are the same, though the conference focus differs. The process provides the group with an enlarged perspective from which to look at their current situation. When a group comes together to develop shared vision, develop mission, purpose, and values, or strategy, they bring with them the issues, concerns, problems and crises with which they have been dealing in the immediate past day or week. Their minds are focused on the particular arenas of their work and life. They wonder about how beneficial will it be to invest their time in this meeting when there are so many things they need to be doing elsewhere. They are concerned about how the meeting will be run. They may not trust the people from other departments, branches, or geography, or interest groups. They may be remembering other planning events that didn't accomplish their purpose because of arguments, unspoken and competing agendas, or too much time being "talked to" by experts that left little time for discussing the really important issues together. So the participants are understandably anxious and curious at the beginning of the conference.

The participants need to work on a task together before they work on the issues that brought them together. They need to see that they share enough common ground and life experiences to convince themselves that they can focus together on their issues and plan together for a common future. Focusing on something larger than their individual responsibilities, larger than the organization they work with, and something far enough removed from their daily work can breakthrough their hesitancy and assumptions about what this meeting will be like. I prefer the task to be related to the focus of the conference, but not specifically planning or problem solving. Not yet!

I use the Wall of Wonder to accomplish these objectives. Creating a shared picture of the world, working and talking together about the events, the significance and the impact on the organization begins to create a sense of community, not just a collection of people in the same room. They can set aside their particular issues and positions for a moment, and work on something together that is both enjoyable and illuminating, The process encourages "out of the

box" thinking and looking at the organization from different perspective than usual. Everybody gets involved and participating right away, responding with simple contributions to the whole picture being created. They enjoy putting the picture together and seeing it develop. It's fun to remember events in society that have impacted everyone, no matter where they lived at the time. It connects them at a global level; they know they live on the same planet! It's illuminating to hear the stories of what happened in the industry or the region. And it's fascinating to hear the stories of the development of the community or company. As they reconnect with events from the past they are amazed at how much change they have lived through together. As they dialogue about its meaning and significance to the organization they create a shared context for their work together. This participative activity sets the tone of the meeting, begins to build trust among the participants, and signals that this meeting is not going to be "business as usual."

Marv Weisbord introduced me to the criteria for effective dialogue developed by Solomon Asch. The criteria, framed by Fred Emery and used in his work with groups are:

"(a) all parties are "talking about the same world," meaning that people back up their generalizations with concrete examples;
(b) all human beings have basic psychological similarities, e.g. "laughing, loving, working, desiring, thinking, perceiving, etc., and if (a) and (b) happen, then –
(c) "the facts of one person's world become part of the other's" and they develop "a shared psychological field." At that point, people become capable of a genuine dialogue on what to do. A successful dialogue depended on how much the parties perceived increased freedom of choice along with greater understanding. If they did, reasoned Emery, then we could assume that –
(d) they will experience their common dilemmas and/or shared fate and plan accordingly." (Weisbord)

This dynamic happens as people develop the Wall of Wonder. People remember events in their world, their profession or locale, and organization, and see the picture through each other's eyes. Discerning shifts within the timeline and titling them, creates another level of shared meaning. Identifying trends impacting the organization creates another. Reflection & dialogue on the whole picture is another. In the first two hours of work together they have created enough of a common context and shared meaning to develop a willingness to take on the next phase of work together with more curiosity, excitement and comfort than when they began.

Origin and Development of the Method
This process grew out of the work of members of the Research Department of the Institute of Cultural Affairs. In 1977-78 they were working on historical trends in human development and curriculum development. a huge montage of historical events was created on a wall of their meeting room to give a broad perspective to their daily work. Pictures were gathered from many sources, including TIME magazine "Man of the Year" covers back to 1946. Colleagues began to call it the "Wall of Wonder." It became a central piece of office décor and the precursor to the ToP™ method, "The Environmental Scan." (Wiegel; Griffith)

It was used at the Global Symposium on Human Development sponsored by the ICA I 1980. The wall was six feet long and the timeline ran 160 years, from 1900 to 2060. In addition to events, the participants named historical figures, the style and mood of different periods,

events, the participants named historical figures, the style and mood of different periods, inventions and innovations, and dominant images. The information was discussed from the perspective of what it revealed about the years from 1900-1980 and 1980-2060, 80 years backwards into the past and forwards into the future. The group divided the timeline by deciding major events that catalyzed turning points. Each division was given a title as a holding image for that time period. Then an overall title was created to describe the full 160 years. Since that time the process has been refined to include naming and analyzing trends.

The method is flexible and has been adapted to different size groups and in various room settings. It incorporates visual, verbal, kinesthetic learning. Some groups draw images or pictures representing different phases. Groups can suggest music that represents different time periods. Some groups have created songs for each section; some put the whole story to song.

Six Dynamics
The Environmental Scan process incorporates six dynamics that are key to its success

1. Expand the Context: People often focus on issues only as they relate to their particular situation without considering how they are related to the past, the future, and to the larger organization. Expanding the context means giving people a larger picture within which issues are considered

2. Stimulate the Imagination: People often anticipate nothing new will come out of meetings. Stimulating the imagination means encouraging new ideas and new ways of thinking and enabling people to sense new connections.

3. Beckon Participation: Many meetings assume only the experts have wisdom that needs to be transferred to other people. Beckoning participation means designing processes that allow dialogue and sharing of ideas to happen across the whole group. It gives everyone the opportunity to take responsibility for the outcome of the meeting.

4. Focus the Issues: Meetings often go around in circles, go off on tangents and get nowhere. Focusing the issues means having the meeting objectives and focus in front of the group, and keeping the conversation on target and moving forward to the point of decision and resolution.

5. Encourage Depth: People often never expect to have their own thinking pushed to new levels. Encouraging depth-thinking means enabling people to use their capabilities to reflect, interpret and discover depth meaning in issues, situations, and decisions.

6. Acknowledge the Significance: Meetings rarely engage people at the level of their deep concerns and cares. Acknowledging the significance means enabling people to recognize the profound meaning of their work to their lives. (Tuecke, based on Powell)

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These dynamics have emerged out of the work of hundreds of colleagues as we developed and refined the ICA methods in our work with groups. They are present in any meeting that embodies inclusive participation and profound respect.
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THE TECHNOLOGY OF PARTICIPATION
Environmental Scan   a.k.a. The Wall of Wonder Procedures

Set –up:
A large wall chart holds a timeline that begins the year the organization began. The present is at the center of the timeline and the future is projected as many years forward as there are in the history of the organization. Down the left side of the chart are 3(4) categories: WORLD, INDUSTRY, ORGANIZATION (YOURSELF).   At the right of the chart is a column entitled TRENDS. The three sections across can be divided by narrow tape. Each of the three section titles on the left is written on a different color half-sheet. Events are written on half-sheets of the same color.

WALL OF WONDER – ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN								
EVENTS	PAST 1975	PRESENT 1985 1995	2000	FUTURE 2005 2015 2025 2035				TRENDS
WORLD								
FACILITATION								
IAF								

I Brainstorming Events
"WRITE DOWN ONE EVENT THAT IMPACTED THE WORLD FOR EACH YEAR ON THE TIMELINE".
If the org. is very old, the years are grouped into 5 or 10 year increments. For future years the group is encouraged to *"use its imagination & write predictions, vision, guesses, hopes, dreams."*

"STAR YOUR 3 MOST EARTH-SHAKING EVENTS ON THEIR LIST. "WRITE THEM ON CARDS, LIKE THIS". - BIG BLOCK LETTERS, ONE EVENT PER CARD, 3-6 WORDS.
If group is large, small teams of 3-4 can be formed. The team reviews each member's key events and selects 3 events from among them. The year the event took place is marked on the back of the card & passed forward to front as the facilitator asks for them.

II Developing the Chart
The facilitator reads out the event on each card & places it on the wall under the year in which it occurred. (Alternately, depending on size of group & time available, people can place cards on the wall themselves.) When all the cards are on the chart, facilitator asks reflective questions like:

"WHAT STRIKES YOU AS YOU LOOK AT THIS CHART?"
"ARE THERE ANY EVENTS YOU HAD COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN ABOUT? "
"WHAT SURPRISES YOU ABOUT THE EVENTS IN THE FUTURE?"

Process is repeated for INDUSTRY. Participants write events on different color half-sheets. Ask the reflective questions.

Repeat for ORGANIZATION. Participants write events on different color half-sheets. Depending on your objectives, you might ask participants to also list important people, accomplishments, changes, quotes or sayings, etc. in the life of the organization. Ask the reflective questions.

III Discovering Relationships and Turning Points

Then, lead a reflective conversation on the whole chart.

"LOOKING OVER THE WHOLE CHART, WHERE DO YOU SEE GREAT CLUSTERS OF EVENTS WHEN A LOT SEEMED TO BE GOING ON ALL AT ONCE?"

"WHERE ARE THERE GAPS, OR SLOW PERIODS?"

"WHAT RELATIONSHIPS DO YOU SEE BETWEEN WHAT GOING ON IN THE WORLD AND THE INDUSTRY?"
- *BETWEEN THE WORLD AND THE ORG.?*
- *BETWEEN OUR ORG. AND THE INDUSTRY WE'RE PART OF? HOW DO WE RESPOND?*

"WHERE DO YOU SEE MAJOR SHIFTS OR TURNING POINTS?"   Mark these on the chart.

"WHAT WOULD YOU SAY THIS IS A MAJOR SHIFT FROM AND WHAT WAS IT A SHIFT TO?" From
_____ to_____ .

"AS YOU LOOK AT THE TIME PERIODS DELINEATED BY THE SHIFTS WE JUST IDENTIFIED, WHAT NAMES WOULD YOU GIVE TO EACH PERIOD? FINISH THE PHRASE, "THIS WAS A TIME OF—"
Write the name above each time period on a different colored sheet of paper or strip of paper.

IV Discerning the Trends & their Implications

"NOW LOOK AT THE BOARD FROM LEFT TO RIGHT. WHAT TRENDS DO YOU SEE EMERGING IN THE WORLD? INDUSTRY? ORGANIZATION?" List these in the TRENDS column.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE TRENDS FOR OUR ORG.?
Get a few answers from the group. There may be time for discussion here, people will have different perspectives on the impact of the trends and may also have suggestions of what the organization can do to maximize/minimize the impact of the trends on their work.

"WE HAVE USED OUR MEMORIES, IMAGINATION & CREATIVITY TO CREATE QUITE AN ART FORM HERE. WHAT NAME WOULD YOU GIVE TO THIS WORK OF ART?"

V. Closing Reflection

"IMAGINE YOU ARE OUTSIDE THIS ROOM WATCHING US WORK THIS MORNING. WHAT DID YOU SEE GOING ON? WHAT DID WE DO?"

"WHAT HAPPENED TO US AS A GROUP AS WE DID THIS?"

" IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW ASKS YOU WHAT YOU DID HERE, WHAT WILL YOU TELL HIM OR HER?"

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MATERIALS NEEDED:
1. Blank solid wall on which to place chart. A ToP "Sticky wall" works very well. Can be done without the sticky wall using "masking tape loops" or "blue tac" for placing half-sheets on the wall. Masking tape or blue tac.
2. Narrow masking tape to mark off the divisions of the chart.
3. Half-sheets of paper in 3 different colors, one for each of the sections (world, industry or region, organization or locale). The dates can be in another color or white.
4. The four "titles" or labels for the left side of the chart WORLD, the name of the INDUSTRY, the name of the ORGANIZATION, & TRENDS written on cards in large print.
5. The dates for the organization or topic, by year, or by 5 or 10 year increment, written on cards.
6. Strips of paper for the section & overall titles. Can use flip chart pages, cut in half or thirds.
7. Wide tip, dark colored markers for people to write with.