



Sabu, Inc.

Helping those  
who must deal with  
*whole systems*

Fax MEMO

814 Lamberton Drive  
Silver Spring, MD 20902-  
3037  
Phone/Fax: 301-649-1296  
E-mail: lewrhodes@AOL.com

Lewis A. Rhodes

DATE: 10/7/04

TO: (name) Jerry Weast

No. of pages transmitted (including this cover) 2+3

---

## PICTURE ON THE JIGSAW PUZZLE BOX

Jerry-

Tomorrow, when we get together to develop a strategy for answering the knowledge-building questions I noted for the team, I'd like, initially, to deal with their need to have a single, coherent way to "see" and understand what I referred to as the "common principles and elements of the capacity-building process" they have been engaged in the past 5 years. My assumption is that it is the application of these principles that offer the answers they are looking for. But first they must *make sense* to them.

Therefore, as *context* for our work, and *rationale* for the dot-connecting, "strategic plot board" I want to show you Friday, I started pulling together several thoughts -- some of which I had shared with Greg Thornton and Judy Lewis earlier this year-- about "logic models" after I heard the term come up at a Board meeting and start to appear at Leadership team and A&S/PGS development team sessions. I had noted this because "logic" is a way to make sense. "Logic models" are usually ways to *systematically* align thoughts and actions to desired ends because we hope they will make more sense than whatever's been going on.

- As MCPS began to connect its parts so they could interact more *systemically* I been seeing the need for a different sense-making "logic model." One that could offer those involved a better way to see and understand the connections that would *instantly* enable them to make sense of *their* "part" and *all the others*. They often expressed this need as "*connecting-the-dots*", *finding the "big picture*," or as the frustration of trying to solve a jigsaw puzzle without the "*picture on the box*."

There seemed to be two "formal" models at play -- one provided by the *Baldrige* processes and more directly engaging Larry's side of the shop, and the other from the *Kellogg Foundation* influencing the "instructional" side. (Some thoughts, attached to this note, focus on the common strengths and weakness of both.)

But I wasn't quite accurate when I said I only found two "logic models" at play here. Actually there were three, but that third is in *your* head. It's what's really driving the system's work, and I've watched you struggle to articulate it on blackboards and through metaphors from the beginning. I knew it was there when I saw you erase the "Baldrige" from an array of new initiatives and re-draw it as a circle around everything else, and when you described the nature of the new Community Superintendent role as a *Yin/Yang*. And, more recently, in a specific product of that thinking process -- the *TCM* (Teaching-Centered Model for technology use). And especially in your words and actions at yesterday's A&S meeting.

- As you know, I've been interested in your and the staffs searching for understanding from the beginning, because I do have a "logic model" in my head that contributes to my sense-making, and which I've been using to better understand the scope and nature of MCPS' experiences over the past 5 years. I've kept it as a personal tool until now but as I mentioned earlier I feel the time has come to "out" it. That the timing may be right was reinforced for me yesterday when Bob Bastress (who had been exposed to the tool last week) leaned over after your A&S presentation and said "*he sounds like he's working from your plotboard.*"

So when we meet tomorrow, I'll try to tie it more directly to its possibilities for capturing and articulating "your logic model" as I saw it framing your words and actions at yesterday's A&S meeting. For example: How it made it possible to:

- See and understand the work of the teacher and principal as the focusing reason for the work of the rest of the system.
- See the requirements of one's day-to-day work as the driving criterion for understanding, building and maintaining the roles and relationships necessary to support it
- See the logic that's been driving your 5 central office re-organizations in 6 years, and then possible new connections that might facilitate your purpose: i.e., to have them functioning as a *coherent system of support* for the work of the district.
- Understand the underlying "3-R's" nature of a "*consistent and persistent message over time of support for teacher and principal.*" This "message" is what people learn from the *consistent and persistent* actions of the system that tell them what the system values. The 3 R's that deliver that message are the Regular processes that the system Requires of all its parts in Response to their common purpose.
- See that there is a common denominator underlying the decisions and actions that produce the system's "results."
- See why the TCM is not a "technology project," but something of deeper and wider significance that might leverage additional funding.
- See and understand how the key elements of "systemic change" that you cited yesterday can be the outcomes of a single, coherent process of thinking and acting:  
*"...we must have 1) 'quality folks' everywhere." 2)... "everything lined up to support teacher and principal ..." 3) "everyone working as part of a continuous improvement model" ...and 4) ...central office working together so you can do important work that you know impacts students."*

At this point in revising my thoughts about what I intended to send you, I'm not sure that its focus on context and rationale is still necessary for our work, but since it may be if use someday for others, I'll attach it.

## MAKING SENSE IN MCPS

“Logic” is a way to make sense. “Logic models” are usually ways to align thoughts and actions to desired ends. The hope is that this will make more sense than whatever’s been going on.

1. - There seem to be two logic modes operating here. One provided by the *Baldrige* processes -- and more directly engaging Larry’s side of the shop, and the other from the *Kellogg Foundation* influencing the “instructional” side.

The latter seemed to be relying on a definition from the Kellogg Foundation’s Logic Model Development Guide that uses the program logic model as a systematic framework for driving *evaluations, research* and *planning*,

“The program logic model is defined as a picture of how your organization does its work – the theory and assumptions underlying the program. A program logic model links outcomes (both short- and long-term) with program activities/processes and the theoretical assumptions/principles of the program.”

The *Kellogg* model seems to deal with the ways an organization does its work as a the *sum* of its systematically managed “program” elements, while the *Baldrige* model addresses its work as its systemically managed *product*.

Here’s what I noticed from the ways they were being used:

- The power of both logic models derived from the different (outcome-referenced) *questions* they made possible.

Back mapping from outcomes should change the nature of the questions asked and their answers by changing the reference point of the “asker.” For example,

- “How can *they* learn it?” produces different answers from “How can *we* teach it?”

- “How can *they* gain access to a resource?” produces different answers from “How can *we* disseminate it?”

- “How can they respond to the real-time demands the context of their role imposes on them?” produces different answers from “How can they do the job they are accountable for?”

- They both were systems of “logical” thought that had to be “learned” cognitively, not intuitively sensed.

- Both the *Baldrige* and *program logic model* offer MCPS seemingly-valid planning, evaluation and research approaches for back-mapping from the intended results. They produce, as the Kellogg definition suggests, a different picture of how people’s work relates to results -- a picture that is essential for the “off-line” tasks of *planning, evaluation and research*.

But for those “on-the-line” who do the daily work, this can create problems when there is an unquestioned flaw in the theory and assumptions about the *work* underlying this *end*-aligned view of the connectedness of the actions that together are the system’s work. They, therefore, find themselves working each day in a reality that doesn’t quite fit with what planners suggest they *should* be experiencing.

When there is a flaw in understanding the nature of the “end” that the outcome is supposed to influence, answers may still seem right “logically”, but not quite “fit”, and prove lasting. Things work... but not for long.

- Some saw value in these models as top-down *planning* frameworks, and did not seem to be considering how a logic model might change when it is used to drive real-time actions, not planning, or after-the-fact evaluation and research. (As an analogy, the *vision* and *mission*-driven “logic model” that is used to plan and plot the course for a fleet of ships across an ocean provides a frame, but is not the logic model used by each ship’s captain for hour-by-hour work of navigation under real time conditions.)

2. - So, to me, these observations suggest why they need to have a way to revisit and start from the “theories, assumptions, and principles that determine how the system presently does its work.”

As rationale for their model, Kellogg quotes Yogi Berra --“*If you don’t know where you’re going, how are you gonna’ know when you get there?*” But, as we say within the *Beltway*, “that depends upon what the definition of *there* is.”

So one of the possible outcomes of the strategies we might think about Friday might be their ability to capture or articulate "your logic model."

That's why I'd like to start by connecting "my" logic model to the contextual factors cited above to see if it meets the criteria for *making intuitive sense*, provides a logical action frame for the Baldrige and Kellogg logic models, and which can suggest how the "dots" of their experiences have been connected by the scope and common nature of some of the development processes over the past five years.

3. One final contextual connection to your team's work – the Harvard link and the importance of what you are doing and learning for others, and not just in education.

MCPS is not alone in working to change a model of thought that apparently is so deeply *logical* that all the accumulating evidence hasn't been sufficient to question it. Here's what three deep thinkers, including Drucker and Senge say about the condition you have been uniquely attacking.

**Peter F. Drucker,**  
"The Theory of the Business"  
Harvard Business Review,  
September-October 1994"

"Today, all over the world, previously successful organizations are facing a "*what to do*" dilemma. They find themselves "stagnating and frustrated, in trouble and, often, in a seemingly unmanageable crisis." And it happens just as often in public sector organizations as businesses.

"The root cause of nearly every one of these crises is not that things are being done poorly. It is not even that the wrong things are being done. Indeed, in most cases, the *right* things are being done -- but fruitlessly.

What accounts for this apparent paradox? The assumptions on which the organization has been built and is being run no longer fit reality. These are the assumptions that shape any organization's behavior, dictate its decisions about what to do and what not to do, and define what the organization considers meaningful results. ...They are what I call a company's *theory of the business*."

..."what underlies the current malaise of so many large and successful organizations worldwide is that their theory of the business no longer works. ...Whenever a big organization gets into trouble--and especially if it has been successful for many years--people blame sluggishness, complacency, arrogance, mammoth bureaucracies. A plausible explanation? Yes. But rarely the relevant or correct one."

**Peter Senge's Foreword to**  
***HOW YOUR CHILD IS SMART***  
by Dawna Markova (1992)

I spend most of my time working within the business community, where the quest is for improved international competitiveness, "total quality," productivity, empowerment. Many of us, both theorists and practitioners, are coming to believe that the real challenge goes beyond the buzzwords--it is to learn how to learn, together.....

...There's only one problem. Most of us have forgotten what we once knew; we have forgotten what it means to live life as a learner. And it is no coincidence. Herein lies the connection between the breakdown of our communities and our stumbling efforts for global competitiveness....

...The "system of management" Deming points to is not something taught only in business schools of Fortune 500 companies. It is a deep set of culturally-embedded beliefs and practices that manifest in social institutions profoundly inconsistent with human nature. *Human beings are designed to learn*. "*The drive to learn*," says the anthropologist Edward T. Hall, "*is more basic than the drive to reproduce*." Our primary social institutions, work and school, are designed to control--and with the breakdown of our family structures, these institutions are increasingly pivotal in shaping social norms and behaviors.

...The young child learns very quickly that school is not about learning. School is about avoiding mistakes. School is about gaining approval and avoiding disapproval. These are the same lessons the first time worker learns. Don't screw up, do what you're told, if something is screwed up make sure you don't get blamed, at all costs look good.

... We are failing our children. And no society can do that for long without paying the price.

Many confronting the deeper nature of our problems cry out that the solution lies in “fixing education.” But you cannot “fix” a structure that was never designed for *learning* in the first place.

Moreover, the “fix education” movement identifies the problem as somewhere “out there,” something caused by incompetent teachers, or non-innovative bureaucrats, or lack of funds. It absolves us of responsibility for the real task--rebuilding the system whereby our children are educated from the foundation up. This will involve questioning basic assumptions, like some kids are smart and some are not. It will involve engaging in a reciprocal process of reflection and inquiry, understanding the unique ways in which each of us learns, adults and child. It will require confronting the pain each of us has experienced in school and work when we discovered that nobody really cared about our ideas, our questions, our dreams. This is not a job that can be delegated. We will all have to re-enter the sacred space of *being a learner*.

From **Right Clothes, Wrong Emperor!**

Lewis A. Rhodes

AASA *Quality Network News*, June/July 2000)

“A week doesn’t go by that I don’t read or hear a comment about schools that makes so much sense that I wonder why others can’t see it as clearly. I’m sure the writer or speaker is as frustrated as I am. In fact, I sometimes feel as the lead character must have in “The Emperor’s New Clothes” who was ignored when he told the truth about what he saw -- specifically that there was no “there” there.

As I recall the fable, the Emperor was provided with imaginary clothes and, through peer pressure, made to believe that they were real. Other people went along with it because the Emperor was not necessarily a fool. After all, vivid descriptions of the clothes had been provided by “expert” tailors. They wouldn’t lie. And, moreover, the Emperor had seen pictures or read descriptions of how they looked on others.

But for me, here’s where that metaphor stops, and my frustration increases. Today, we have many new practices intended to clothe our "barren" schools. The “clothes” are real. They work, and many who have tried on the *separate* pieces have recognized their value. **But this time, *there’s no Emperor!***

More exactly, the scope and nature of the connected, whole “body” the clothes are designed to fit is not the structure most of the clothing developers have *assumed* it is. The concept of the school system, the presumed structure serving as the mannequin for effective practices is proving to be false as we learn more about how people learn and work together.

We’ve been using a picture drawn from *assumptions* of why and how organization’s work (or *should* work.) From these assumptions we’ve drawn the “body” in pyramid-shaped charts that seem useful for deploying resources, but which strangely never portray how the organization’s work actually gets done....”