DESIGN PHASE

The *Dream* phase articulated the strategic focus, such as a vision of sustainability, a powerful purpose, and a compelling statement of strategic intent. In the *Design* phase, attention turns to creating the ideal organization in order to achieve its dream. Future images emerge through grounded examples from an organization’s positive past. Good-news stories are used to craft provocative propositions that bridge the best of “what gives life” with a collective aspiration of “what might be.”

The *Design* phase of the 4-D process is key to sustaining positive change and responding to the organization’s most positive past and highest potential. The positive core identified and expounded in the first two phases begins to take form.

The Design phase involves the creation of the organization’s social architecture. This new social architecture is embedded in the organization by generating provocative propositions that embody the organization dream in the ongoing activities. Everything about organizing is reflected and responsive to the dream, the organization’s greatest potential. By crafting the organization’s social architecture, stakeholders define the basic infrastructure. This phase requires in-depth dialogues about the best structure and processes to support the new system.

The Design phase involves the collective construction of positive images of the organization’s future in terms of provocative propositions based on a chosen social architecture.

The design starts by crafting provocative propositions. As provocative propositions are composed, the desired qualities of organizing and organizational life are articulated. Sometimes referred to as possibility propositions, they bridge “the best of what is” (identified in Discovery) with “what might be” (imagined in Dream). They are written in the present tense. They re-create the organization’s image of itself by presenting clear, compelling pictures of how things will be when the positive core is fully effective in all of its strategies, processes, systems, decisions, and collaborations. In this way, provocative propositions redirect daily actions and create future possibilities and a shared vision for the organization and its members. It is important that the design fully integrate the “best of past and possibility” and that it be consistent with the intended outcome of the inquiry.