

## **Pre-Learning Exchange Questions to Future Search Clients / Sponsors / Organisers**

**Your Name and Position:** Eva Sophia Myers, Head of Administration, the Faculty of Science, University of Southern Denmark

**Future Search Topic(s):** Educational programmes we are proud of

**Year of Future Search(es):** January 2011

1. What was it that made you decide to take the responsibility and initiative to work with the principles of FS and the FS method for the (strategic) future of your organization, community or group. What kind of experience, knowledge and insights played an important part in your decision making process to use FS? Did you consider any other process or methodology? What exactly made you go for it?

ESM: My position prior to my present one was in-house organizational consultant at the university where I am working (still). During my time as consultant I became introduced to Marvin and Sandra's meeting facilitation principles and theory which were aligned with the way I was working and what I find to be important.

The overarching objective of my present position is to bring the faculty together in important issues and to nurture and nourish the ongoing dialogue and cooperation on our joint tasks and various strategies.

One of the first and foremost tasks that I undertook was to introduce alternative ways to engage our staff in decision-making, collaboration and defining strategies to the Dean of the Faculty – ways that would be aligned in form/structure and the in- and output of the activities, and one that would enhance inclusivity and democratic communication.

The faculty had been experiencing a number of events that had the opposite effect and the working environment on a general level was at a low, the confidence in the management of the faculty was off, and we were at a serious financial recession, so something had to happen. One of the most crucial sources of our financial crisis was our inability to keep our students in our educational programmes, our inability to adapt to the needs and expectations and skills of our student population. We had been attempting various solutions to this big problem for many years, but over the last one to two years, the failure to substantially address this issue had become directly and visibly financially untenable.

Part of the introduction to alternative ways of engaging was for the Dean and I to attend the Future Search facilitation training workshop with Sandra and Marv in September 2010 in Belgium. My initial thought was to apply the method of FS to questions along the lines of larger joint research strategies of the faculty or how to ensure a working environment and working conditions that would cater to a diverse workforce and therefore able to attract and retain women in higher academic and leadership positions at the faculty. While we were in Belgium, however, we learnt that the newly devised plan for addressing the educational crisis at the faculty was imploding and there was a dire need to do something different. While at the workshop we therefore decided that we would put together a future search or at least go through the initial planning to see with a larger planning group if the format of FS

would make enough sense for us to go forward with it, which in the event was the conclusion from the planning meeting. In hindsight, the topic 'educational programmes we are proud of' is well suited for the FS-format, not least because – unlike research programmes – education and teaching is to a much higher degree something that we are truly interdependent in getting off the ground.

Before settling on FS as a gathering and focusing format for this endeavour, I was advocating various other large group intervention formats in the planning, defining and implementation of ways to address our education - problem, but we rarely moved beyond traditional routines for this sort of work – such as committees, hearings and reports.

2. What was the outcome of the FS Conference for your organization, community or group in terms of new insights, new solutions, new policies, process improvement, innovation in products and/or services and unique unexpected results worth mentioning etc. What was the most significant outcome?

ESM: the outcome is still underway, but so far the most significant outcome of the FS is the joint and widespread understanding that we need to do something different than what we have done so far. It is also very clear for all parties involved that responsibility for doing this lies primarily with the teachers of our programmes and courses (unlike administrators and management, which was the generally accepted practice and wisdom before FS) and secondly in the huge task of coordination between courses, teachers, programmes and administrative procedures. These basic understandings have influenced a number of key decisions for the entire faculty, such as the decision to employ a Vice Dean for our educational programmes to drive the necessary changes and development in the wake of FS. We are in the midst of rethinking and envisioning an entire didactical approach to our educations and this goes hand in hand with a makeover of our educational administrative procedures.

A less tangible but nevertheless hugely important outcome is the general sense of hope and purpose that has pervaded the faculty – even people who did not attend the FS-seminar itself are intensely interested in the outcome of the ensuing actions and initiatives, and it is one of the hottest topics of all formal meetings of the different units – a success in itself, not least because teaching is generally an undervalued and low-status duty, and FS has in many ways legitimized debates and investigations and queries and exchanges concerning teaching and students and relation between student and teacher in a hitherto unseen proportion.

3. What happened after the FS Conference? Who was responsible for the follow up, how was the follow up planned/designed, who took part in it and what was the result?

ESM: we are in the thick of the follow-up. One of the good aspects of FS for us has been the unwavering commitment of the management of the faculty. Follow-up on FS is thus one of the major running issues on the agenda for the team of leaders which numbers the dean, the vice dean, four heads of department and the head of administration (me).

After the FS-seminar we anchored the eight common ground groups that evolved during the seminar in three overarching coordinating groups and these have functioned reasonably well. There is progress in all groups, even despite some very deep and conflicting trends in especially one of the groups.

4. Can you see certain ripples at this moment in time as a result of the FS process? Name two ripples that are visible in and outside the organization, community or group now.

One of the more evident ripples at this time (I think it may still be a little early to say conclusively – let alone be able to spot the ripples in a meaningful way) is that the Dean has recently undergone a 360-degree leader evaluation and some of the unanimously positive feedback on his leadership has been in connection with his sponsoring and responding in the FS-context.

Another ripple within the faculty is that FS has now become a concept in and of itself, a joint reference point for the entire faculty.

There is great belief and vast hopes that some of the very concrete actions that we are initiating as a result of the FS and the follow-up will turn the financial tide for us, and when this happens it may inspire the university top-management

5. What were the most memorable moments in the FS process for you personally. Name two unforgettable moments that still stand out at this moment in time.

One unforgettable moment for me during the FS seminar was the first evening in one of the breaks I asked what the Dean thought of the process so far, and he lit up in a huge smile and said that it was the most incredible experience to hear his own deepest concerns voiced by the other participants. This experience continues to hold, and is reiterated and enhanced for the Dean in the many conversations and debates following the FS-seminar within the faculty. It was important for me because this was exactly what I wanted to have him experience, for the sake of the overall welfare and creativity of the entire faculty – to have his leadership anchored and legitimized with a strong mandate and backing stemming from an inclusive engagement between leaders and employees as well as a dynamic and healthy open debate about this important topic.

Another unforgettable moment for me was when one of our professors stood up and stated very simply that it was clear that the responsibility for bringing about substantial and lasting change in our approach to running the programmes and the meeting of and catering to our students rested primarily with the teachers of the programmes – and that other initiatives such as administrative, procedural or merely structural changes, for all their merit, would never alone be able to turn the tables.