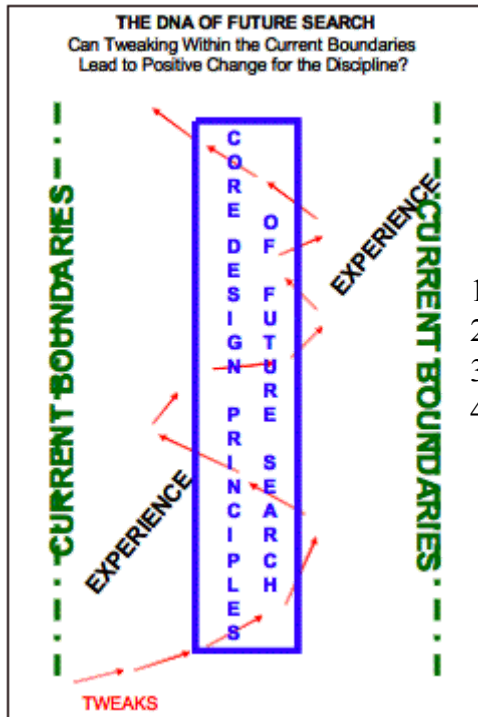


# Summary of the Reality Dialogue On Day Two at the Northern Ireland Learning Exchange Of the Future Search Network, June 2005

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## Introduction

When is a future search not a future search? This is a question that usually comes up whenever Future Search Facilitators gather. It is also a question for which we have yet to come up with an agreed-upon answer. If I do a program in two days instead of three, is it a Future Search? If I leave out timelines, is it a Future Search?



Not unexpectedly, this question came up at the Learning Exchange in Northern Ireland. Once again, no definitive answer was reached, but we did develop a model that helps to clarify the question, which was dubbed, "The DNA of Future Search."

There seemed to be universal agreement that a Future Search is based on the four core principles:

1. Get the "whole system" in the room.
2. Global exploration before local action.
3. Put common ground and future focus front and center.
4. Encourage self-management and responsibility for action by participants.

Practitioners may "tweak" or make variations in the generic design to meet the needs of clients. In fact, Sandra and Marv have made changes in the design since they first started doing Future Search. Nonetheless, there is faithfulness to the core principles. Part of the Network is sharing variations and ideas with each other including what has worked and what has not worked, and getting feedback and reactions from other practitioners. Thus

we are a learning community and the Future Search design evolves.

The model, "The DNA of Future Search," attempts to capture this by being centered on the core principles while indicating variations based on experience. The current boundaries are permeable, indicated by dotted lines. We did not reach any consensus definition of what those current boundaries are. However, there was agreement that there are boundaries and that they matter if we are to call what we facilitate a Future Search.

Clearly, we may never reach complete agreement on what the boundaries are. Part of the genius of Future Search and the Network is the on-going exploration of the boundaries and the evolution of our methodology.

The following are the results of a reality dialogue on the boundaries, principles of practice, actions, behaviors and interventions of facilitators, generated on Day 2 at the Northern Ireland Learning Exchange. (The next three sections were reproduced from the flip charts and published in the LE Summary on the FSN website.)

**Principles of Practice:** What is acceptable in this Network? What is acceptable in this process?

1. Provided that we adhere to the core design principles, we trust each other to work in a responsible way, respecting the boundaries.
2. Within the Network, we share our experiences of working close to the boundaries – at the ‘learning edge’
3. We take risks responsibly.
4. We use the Network as a learning and mentoring community.
5. We use the core design principles as an anchor to help us experiment.
6. We distinguish between ‘process consulting’, ‘expert consulting’, and ‘contracting’.
7. We manage risks and expectations.
8. We openly share resources, ideas, techniques, experience, etc.
9. We nurture the evolution of our Future Search facilitation by modeling the change methodology we espouse.

### **Ways of working**

- Don’t promise more than you can deliver
- Work with integrity, trust, humility, openness
- Mutual learning
- Clear contracting re. roles and expectations at each phase (planning, the event, follow-up)

### **We need more work to define the following:**

- Where are the **boundaries** now?
- What do we mean by **principles**? (Core design principles = the four principles in the F/S book.)
- Where is the **Network** going? What’s its function? Rules? Future?
- Do we need an F/S on F/S?
- What does **integrity** mean? Re. practitioners? Re. the F/S method?

### **Appendix: “The Wall”**

This Appendix includes all the ideas that were posted on the wall on Day 2 to illuminate the ideas of principles, actions/interventions/behaviors and unresolved issues.