

For Karen
Evan and Heather

Imagin·i·zation

New Mindsets for
Seeing,
Organizing
and Managing

Gareth Morgan



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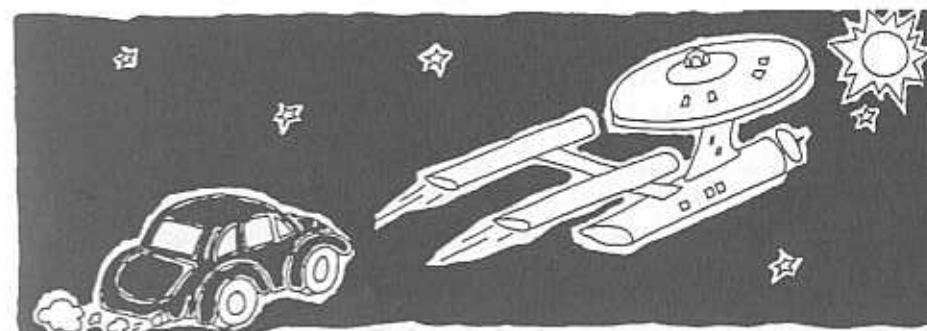


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10 Picture Power

Imaginization is about the creation of "new space": new space in which new thinking, new insights, and new dialogue can develop and from which new initiatives can emerge. This is one of the key themes that unites all the chapters in this book. Whether talking about issues of management style, organizational design, the management and facilitation of change, or the development of teamwork, emphasis has been placed on finding imaginative ways of helping people break into the space that they need to act differently.

In the previous chapter, I began to show how this can be achieved by encouraging people to create pictures of their present and future realities. The current chapter continues this theme, providing a further example of how this kind of "picture power" can create opportunities for reshaping the culture and general development of an organization.



Suppose that I were to draw a picture and ask you to use it as a way of thinking about your organization.

You might think it a strange assignment. But, with a little thought, I'm sure that you'd come up with some interesting insights.

For example, here's a summarized response from a group of senior human resource managers who invited me to help them create some new theory for understanding their organization.

I drew a carton of yogurt and asked them for their response. This is how it went:



The Group: Our organization as yogurt? . . .

It's a culture.

It reproduces itself.

It's like yeast.

It takes time to mature.

It's sour.

It's boring.

You have to sweeten it up.

Comes in many flavors.

Very primitive.

But very middle class!

Full of bacteria.

You add some of the old culture to a new batch and before long it's all the same.

GM: What, among all these ideas, is most important for understanding your organization?

The Group: We have a tendency to make everything the same.

We bring in newcomers, and before you know it they're like the old. . . . It's amazing how quickly they adapt to the way things are.

GM: How does this process of assimilation occur?

The group went on to discuss the detailed ways in which the corporate culture reproduced itself on a daily basis. They drew parallels between the bacterial functions in yogurt and how corporate "bacteria" work to convert staff into corporate clones. They began to see how the bacterial imagery was identifying a problem. But they also saw how it could be turned into an opportunity.

"How do we create opportunities for new 'strains' [of bacteria] to establish themselves?"

"How do we develop different subcultures?"

The discussion took on a very positive tone and created a platform for identifying specific strategies and tactics through which human resource management could have a positive and diverse impact on an organizations' culture.

So, a seemingly strange image, just like that of the spider plant in Chapter 4, produced a flow of creative discussion that helped people see and talk about their organization in new ways. It created new space in which new ideas could emerge.

My aim in this exercise, which also introduced pictures of an umbrella, an iceberg, a pot of glue, and a fish in a bowl of water, was to help the group become their own theorists. They'd asked me to work with them because they felt that I had a lot to tell them about "new theory" and the ideas that would be in vogue in the years ahead. We addressed this agenda, but the most important message that I was able to give them through the exercise was that *they*, their experience and imaginations, were their own most important resource.





Too many managers are looking outside themselves for answers to their problems. They are looking for the latest theory and at what successful organizations are doing. They are trying to spot the latest trends. In reality, they would be better off engaging in some critical thinking for themselves, recognizing that they and their colleagues already have a vast treasure of insight and experience, which they could and should be using. The challenge is to tap this insight and understanding in a constructive way.

In previous chapters, I have presented many means through which this can be done. All, in one way or another, have created visual images that allow people to see themselves or their organizations anew. That's the message that underlies the spider plant, the strategic termite, the political football, the "blob out of water," the yogurt, the iceberg, and all the other specific images that have been discussed. They create a distance and detachment from existing concepts and existing thinking, distance and detachment that allow fresh perspectives to emerge.

The visual element in all this is of key importance: because it helps to create a new *picture* of the situation with which one is dealing.

If I ask you to "see your organization as yogurt," you are obliged to get into a completely different frame of reference from that which governs your normal thinking. And that's what seeds the creative possibilities.

In the rest of this chapter, I want to illustrate this aspect of imaginization in more detail by showing how the method of getting people to develop their own pictures of their situation can unleash enormous potential for fresh understanding and change. I began to introduce the approach in discussing the

development of teamwork in Chapter 9. Now, I want to feature a case based on the work of my colleague Joe Arbuckle, a management consultant who uses a similar method to help organizations create new futures.

CREATING A "NEW STORY"

One of Joe's methods focuses on the idea of helping people create a "new story" for their organization. Every organization is located in a past and present: its "old story." This often acts as a prison, locking the future into the past. Joe addresses the problem by creating opportunities for people to express their images, thoughts, and feelings about their old story to see whether a change is in order. He then uses further imaging exercises to help people identify the new story that they would like to create and to develop the personal and organizational competencies that will be required to make it a reality.

The approach can be used with top managers interested in reimagining and reshaping their organization, with groups of middle managers concerned to revitalize the work of their unit or department, and with "diagonal slices" designed to provide a representative view of the total organization. It can be used by a manager who wishes to create new relations with his or her staff. Here's an example drawn from Joe's work with a retailing firm with annual sales of more than \$1.5 billion. The firm employed 4,000 people, managed 400 retail stores, and was trying to create a major transformation in its approach to business.

The organization, which we'll call *Transform*, was in an important stage of transition. After many years of profitable operation as a distribution network organized as an extension of its warehouses, the company was interested in becoming more "market driven" and "customer sensitive." At the initiative of its new president, Joe was invited to help develop and disseminate a new sense of vision throughout the company. The president wanted his staff to grasp new possibilities for the future and to create a radically new form of organization for managing day-to-day practice.

As part of the process, two three-day workshops were conducted in a retreat setting. Each involved the president and a

different group of 35 people drawn from top to bottom of the organization. The mandate was to help create a "market-driven organization." Joe organized the workshops around an Old Story-New Story format. The first day was spent imaging "the Old Story" in terms of existing concepts of the business, the existing features of the organization, and the general feelings and experiences of staff. The second day was devoted to creating a vision of "the New Story," again by focusing on the business, the organization, and its people. Day three, chaired by the president, focused on "Inventing the Future": on finding ways of making the "New Story" a reality. In the following pages, I want to capture the composite nature and mood of the two events and illustrate some of the key ideas that emerged.

After appropriate introductions, and an exploration of the workshop aims, the process began with an exercise designed to help participants get outside their usual frame of reference for viewing the business. Each member of the retreat was asked to describe the difference between going into one of their retail stores and going into a store of their major competitor. The exercise was explicitly designed to highlight the differences between being "supplier and warehouse driven" on the one hand (their existing situation) and being "market driven" on the other (the position of the competitor). Participants were asked to generate images for capturing the two experiences and to use colored pens to depict customers, and customers' feelings, in the two stores. The images were then shared in small groups, and the drawings that best represented the views of each group were then presented to the total gathering.

The response was vivid and direct. In both workshops, customers were viewed as having extremely negative "in-store" experiences.

For example, group images depicted customers as being exposed to robotic, "Yes sir. No sir," "Yes sir. No sir," "Yes sir. No sir," dialogue.

There were pictures of long lines of customers.

A sales representative was shown performing a "hold up" on the customer, waving a gun and saying, "What do you want?"

There were lots of frowns and stop signs.

The stores were drawn in black and white. They were featureless.



In the competitor stores, on the other hand, the images were more highly colored: smiles, close interaction between sales assistants and customers—an altogether more integrated and harmonious experience.

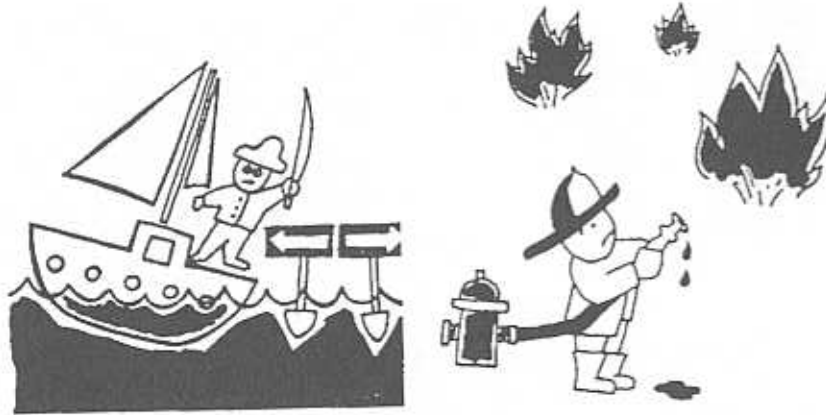
The message was clear: Customers don't have a good experience in our stores. The competitor has the edge.

After this simple, yet very powerful exercise, there could be little doubt about the need for change and about the new customer and marketing orientation that provided the frame for the retreat. Relations with key suppliers had dominated the organization's past. Relations with the customer needed to become more prominent in the future.

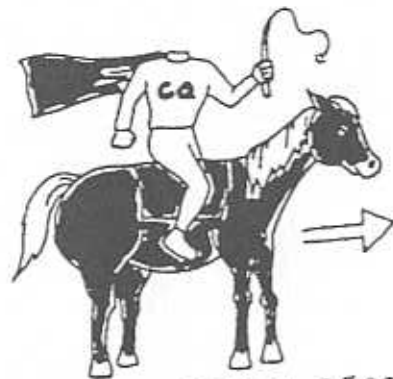
The understanding was there for everyone to see. The resonance between the images generated by the groups in each retreat created a shared appreciation of problems and challenges on which each workshop could build.

From there, the participants proceeded to take a closer look at their current organization and the role of staff within the organization. For each part of the exercise, people were invited to develop and draw their own images, share them in a small group, and then present the images that had most meaning for the group back to the total gathering. The process resulted in dozens of creative images, most of which were drawn in evocative color. For example, *images of the current organization* included the following:

- A green tortoise carrying some of the company's products on its back (symbolizing slow movement)
- An old-style gramophone (symbolizing the organization's old style form and message)



- A rudderless boat facing contradictory directions (symbolizing drift)
- A fire-fighting brigade with hoses that weren't reaching the fire (symbolizing a basic incompetence)
- An octopus juggling a set of tools (symbolizing multiple and conflicting work demands)
- A headless horseman (symbolizing how the current emphasis on low-cost productivity eliminated the use of people's brains)
- A pyramid with people at the top and bottom, with headless chickens in the middle (symbolizing the confusion and lack of direction in the core of the enterprise)



PRODUCTION 2500

The images of the current organization in both workshops had this overwhelmingly negative tone.

So did people's images of the roles of staff within the current organization.

To launch this second phase of the exercise, Joe seeded the creative process by inviting everyone to draw a character that they would like to bring to an "Organizational Theme Party": the character that they felt the organization invited them to be while at work! The assignment was to draw a picture of their character's costume and to depict whether the costume helped or hindered the organization's overall performance.

Here are some of the guests that turned up:

- A blind person wearing three different hats with a ball and chain around his feet, being pulled in different directions
- An all-purpose sports person, with a football helmet, a basketball, a hockey stick, a skate on one foot, and a studded soccer boot on the other
- A serpent
- A piece in a jigsaw puzzle
- A person that was bound and gagged, with a light bulb symbolizing his bright ideas
- A fireman, orchestra conductor, and football referee, all in one person
- A knight of the round table defending the faith
- A person that was half saint and half devil (symbolizing "how to get on around here")



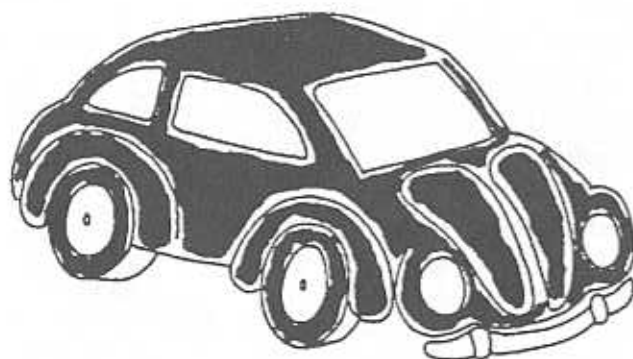
The images in general communicated the sense of stress, frustration, and multiple demands that people experienced at work. As in the case of the images of the current organization, there was a deep sense of discontent.



With this exercise complete, Joe then invited each team to create a mural describing the current reality of the organization, based on all that they'd seen and heard during the day. They were invited to look over all the drawings produced in the workshops, which were now posted around the room, to discuss the implications in their small groups, and then to represent their group's overall view of the current state of the business, the organization, and its people. These "Old Story Murals," twelve feet by three feet in size, were then presented to the total gathering at the end of the day.

The murals were all brightly colored imaginative renderings that tapped heartfelt feelings about current problems. For example, the mural *A Journey into Spring* represented the organization as a horse-drawn cart on a railway track about to go through a tunnel. At the other side of the tunnel, the track forked, one fork leading toward a dangerous set of rocks, the other, into a beautiful spring scene.

Repainting the Volkswagen symbolized the company as a series of old-style Volkswagen "beetles," repainted in several different colors over the period from the 1920s to the 1990s, with the background scene capturing key aspects of the organization: a tug-of-war team battling between productivity and service, bleak warehouses, controlling suppliers, stop signs, frowns, walls blocking new ideas, traffic lights constantly on orange.



Another mural captured the organization as a "juggling octopus," at first happy, then confused, and finally completely overwhelmed. Another depicted the history of a caveman wear-

ing different fashions—superficially different but a caveman throughout!

Sailboats represented the organization as a boat caught in a storm, with its competitors racing ahead. The sails were tattered, and the boat was surrounded by mines—the competitive threats from the environment. The wind was blowing and the crew was bailing out. Overhead was a large productivity blimp, about to blow up because its fuse was running out. But in the sky beyond was an optimistic rainbow, symbolizing a possible future for the organization.

The Olympics featured an organizational Olympics with events that captured key aspects of the current enterprise: a "Paper Pole Vault," featuring a person trying to vault a mountain of paper; a "Tug-of-War"; the "Running into a Brick Wall event"; the "Scowling event"; the "Fire-Fighting event"; the "David and Goliath event"; the "Lost Soul event"; and the "Square-Peg-in-the-Round-Hole event." The humor penetrated to the heart of many aspects of the organization's malaise.

Ready to Burst, shown in Exhibit 10.1, is reproduced here to illustrate the richness of the images that were produced. As in the case of the murals described above, color, humor, and insight were intertwined to create a powerful view of the organization's old story.



EXHIBIT 10.1 "READY TO BURST"

NOTE: Both exhibits in this chapter have been redrawn to scale from murals 12 x 3 feet in size.

As can be seen, the mural starts at the left-hand side with a serpent blowing bubbles. The serpent had emerged at the theme party earlier in the day, symbolizing the "official questioner of

reality" in the story of Adam and Eve. But, in the mural, staff placed the serpent in a new role. Instead of questioning reality and trying to play a liberating role, the serpent was blowing self-sealing bubbles, within which the organization was now caught.

The first bubble represents the organization as a box containing robotized people: featureless, boxed, lacking initiative and creativity. The second bubble contains an octopus with three different hats: a fireman's hat, a cowboy hat, and a hard hat, representing the different roles and demands placed on the octopus (the people in the organization). The octopus was colored red to symbolize its anger and frustration. It was angry and frustrated because the tools it needed to do its work lay outside the bubble! It was doing its best to break the bubble—the needle held by one of its tentacles being pushed hard against the inside wall. But the bubble won't burst.

Another serpent is watching what the octopus is doing. But it's wearing earmuffs! The official questioner of reality does not want to hear what's being said! The serpent has become a part of the problem. The role it could play in helping to burst the bubble from the outside is not operational.

The third bubble contains a jester with a serpent's tongue. The jester, of course, tries to convey fundamental truths in a humorous way, as is happening through the images represented in all the murals. But, even though he is trying to speak to the serpent, he is not being heard. He too has a needle and is trying to burst the bubble. But it just won't burst.

Bubble four contains a hatching egg, with a hand beginning to reach out. But the bubble is still sealed. New life in the egg is thus in danger of suffocation. It needs air to breathe. The bubble *must* be burst if there is to be new life and a future (for the organization). There is now a needle outside the bubble. Pressure is being exerted, but we are left anticipating the result.

The richness and continuity reflected in this mural are typical of the others that were presented. Each group took the task of producing a mural to heart and produced fundamental and challenging insights about their organization, presented with a humor that, in the style of the jester, made fundamental truths more palatable and manageable. Joe Arbuckle's role in all this was to facilitate their storytelling and then to draw out and

integrate its common themes. In bypassing the organization's usual modes of dialogue, the visual imaging and storytelling created an opportunity for fresh insight and momentum to emerge. The process allowed people to tap into what they really thought and felt, and it allowed them to dig into depths of creativity that they were rarely able to express at work. Collectively, the process helped to create a shared understanding of common problems that could act as a powerful platform for change.

The focus of the second day of each workshop was "Creating a New Story." Joe took them through a new imaging process focusing on the business, the organization, and its people, this time with the future in mind. The day was framed by the president's aim of creating a more market-driven organization, the importance of which was now owned and thoroughly understood as a result of the previous day. Again, the imaging process produced a colorful and inventive response from staff.

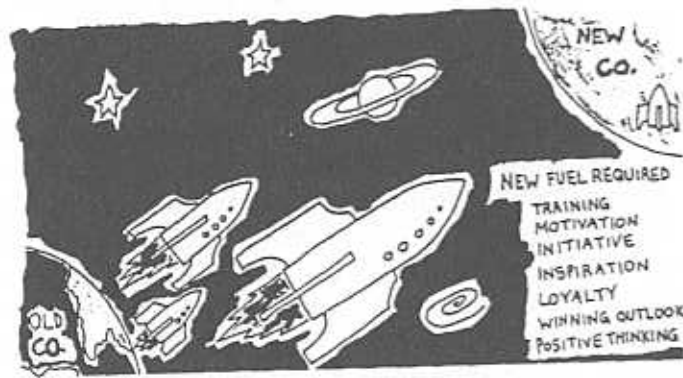
The images of the *new business* were captured in pictures that replaced the stern, plain, staid images of the present with colorful, dynamic, fun, exciting retail stores that could be "experienced." They had more in common with a Disney theme park than the warehousing mentality driving the old organization.

The *new organization* was captured through images of hearts, brains, bridges, and spacecraft, for example:

- A large red heart connected with a large gray brain to show how successful innovation needed to have an emotional and integrated base as well as a conceptual one
- A bridge connecting innovative ideas with corporate goals, supported by pillars of resolve, determination, and teamwork
- A customer pulling all the different pieces of the organization together



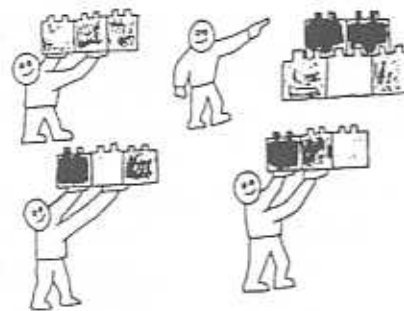
- A spacecraft fueled by training, motivation, and a new culture: to replace the repainted Volkswagen that had been passed down over the years



Images of the people required in the new organization reflected similar themes:

Variations on the Wizard of Oz theme featured people that were whole and connected.

Multicolored Lego people were used to symbolize how staff should be different yet able to put themselves together in various combinations to create a variety of shapes. The differentiated yet interchangeable parts of the Lego set sent a powerful message about the power of diversity and the possibilities for new forms of organization and self-organization!



- Astronauts
- Windsurfers
- Mountain climbers
- Explorers of the unknown

- A party invitation inviting guests (staff members) to "Break Conformity," "Unleash Potential," and "Just Do It!!!!"

With all these images producing a rich and creative environment, the groups were then set to work creating a *New Story Mural*: one they believed could realize the potential of the enterprise in practice. The mandate was to review all that had gone before and produce a pictorial story that integrated the best images and ideas for shaping the future enterprise.

The murals again presented an impressive and colorful set of insights, for example:

- Space voyages decorated with symbols of the new retailing philosophy
- "The Store Is Our Stage": a new vision of the business as a form of theater with management as a performing art
- An innovative organization dominated by heart and brain, decorated with visual representations of progressive new forms of management
- A mural featuring sequences of a horse jumping a series of fences: As the fences got bigger, so did the horse! The mural was designed to communicate the idea of an organization that can grow with its challenges. In the background of the mural, there was a well-equipped barn, symbolizing the organization's capacity to produce great horses!

The images were all much more optimistic and empowering than those featured in the old story. Exhibit 10.2 illustrates how the suffocating and frustrated story captured in the "Ready (But Unable) to Burst" theme in Exhibit 10.1 became an optimistic and aggressive "Catch This!" challenge to the firm's competition. All the murals reflected this kind of general transformation and expressed the potential of the organization to move into an optimistic new future.

As can be seen, the "Catch This!" mural begins in the bottom left-hand corner where Exhibit 10.1 ended.

It features the bubble, the hatching egg, and the old serpent.

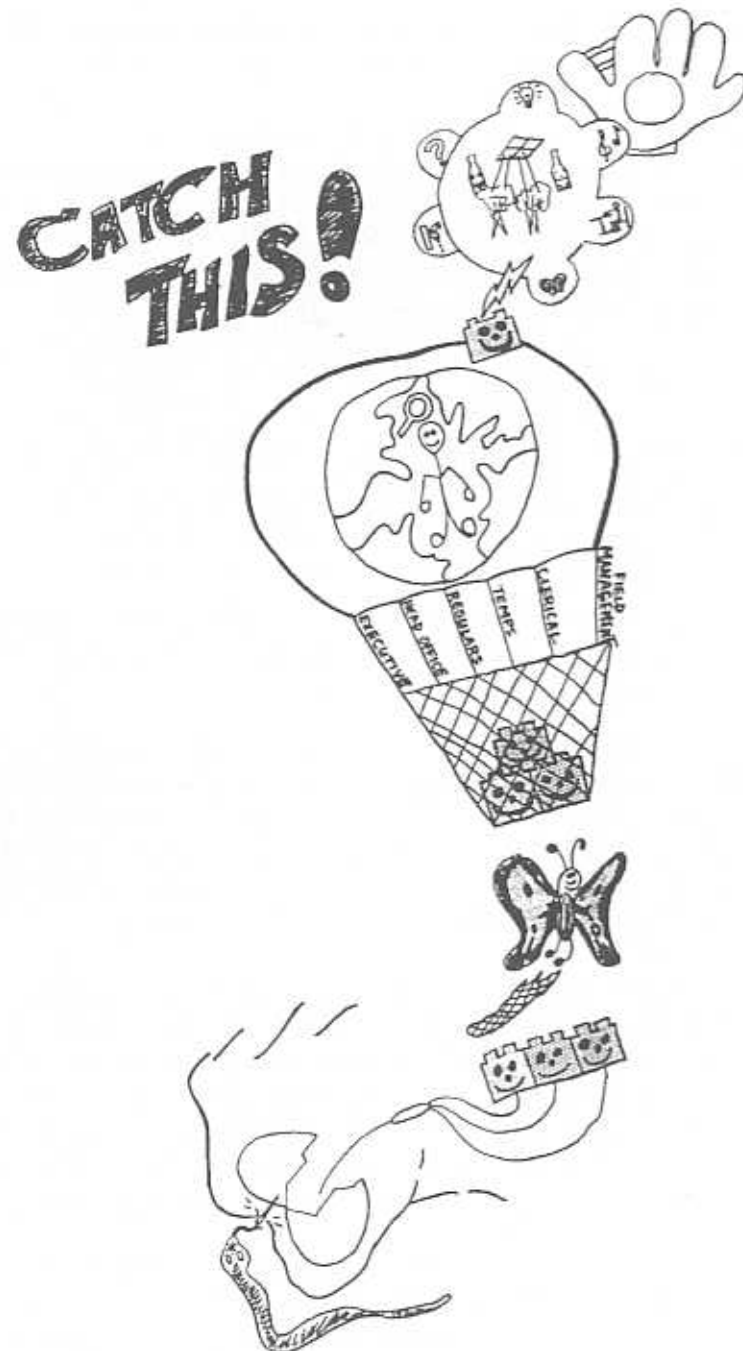


EXHIBIT 10.2 "CATCH THIS!"

But the serpent now has a needle. The earmuffs are gone, and it's breaking the bubble!

Inside, the egg has hatched. There is new life spreading upward. Pieces of Lego in orange, red, and blue sit side by side, symbolizing the diverse and flexible image of staff that had emerged in earlier discussion.

Above them, a butterfly is leaving its cocoon, symbolizing the transformation required in the existing organization.

Higher still floats a hot-air balloon. The Lego people are now connected in a new form, sitting in the basket. Above them, as a large motif on the balloon itself, we find an image of the customer-centered organization. The customer is drawing different parts of the organizational world together, building on an image that the group had discussed earlier in the day.

The balloon is linked to its basket through different colored ropes, all of which are equally important, representing the essential contributions of executive staff, head office, full- and part-time staff, clerical workers, and field management.

At the very top of the balloon is a purple Lego person symbolizing the creativity of people. This is linked through a flash of insight to an image of the new-style customer-oriented retail store, an image used to capture the vision of the new market-driven approach to business.

In the top right-hand corner of the mural is a baseball glove. Hence the message: "Catch This!" The whole story represented in the mural is being thrown as a major challenge to the competition that, until now, had left the existing organization way behind.

The invitation of all the new story murals was to develop a future that represented a dramatic rift with the past. The imaging process created enormous leverage for change, allowing staff to see and express existing reality in a fresh way and to come up with their own ideas for shaping a path to the future. Joe integrated the various insights emerging from the workshops, spelling out and consolidating the connections between the various murals, thus creating a valuable foundation on which the change process could build.

By the end of the second day, the mood in both workshops was extremely positive. Everyone seemed very pleased with themselves, and for good reason. In just two days, they had

tapped an enormous amount of creativity, showing that, though people had joined the workshop in a rather tired, disillusioned, and frustrated state of mind, the opportunities were enormous. They had every reason to be very impressed with themselves. They were store clerks, accountants, middle managers, and vice presidents, not artists and storytellers. But they had brought out the artistry and storytelling from within themselves to forge an emerging vision of the way forward. Moreover, this was no abstract vision "out there" in a consulting report or strategic planning brief. It was a vision that used many different modes of expression to tell the same story. It was a vision that was a product of personal experience, personal feelings, personal reflection, and genuine dialogue. It was a vision over which they had direct ownership and of which they felt part. The vision was really an extension of themselves. In breaking free of the old-style images, they had created a valuable opportunity for remaking themselves and their organization.

Against this backdrop, the third day presented Joe with a relatively easy task.

The success of what had gone before created a new energy in which to explore the action agenda needed to realize the new story in practice. Continuing the theme of the previous two days, the president was placed in charge of a process designed to explore concrete ideas on how to "invent the future" by transforming current reality. Instead of focusing on fixing the old, attention was placed on creating the new. The mandate: to find the big ideas that could help to transform the business, its organization, and its people and to develop the implications of the ideas that seemed to offer most promise. The day created a vibrant exchange on specific policy initiatives, creating a detailed action base on which the change initiative could build.

As a result of the retreat, the president launched a major change initiative using the images and ideas emerging from workshop seminars as design principles for shaping the new organization. The transition from the repainted Volkswagen beetle to the futuristic starship was selected as a central guiding theme for throwing a "Catch This" challenge to the competition. Decisions were made to redesign retail stores to create a "high-tech," "high-touch" customer experience. The metaphor of store manager as "drama director" was selected as a

means of making this a reality, with the president urging the company to rethink and refocus its activities to support the "on-stage performance" of the managers and their staff. To achieve this, decisions were made to restyle central organizational activities so that support to the stores, rather than control from head office, became the overarching theme. The roles of existing vice presidents and their staff were changed, so that they could become "resource partners" in the emerging network of stores rather than old-style line managers. Because the abilities of staff were crucial for making this new story come true, a search was initiated for a new vice president of human resources. This was accompanied by a clear commitment that the new-style employee would be valued as a creative partner in developing the new customer-centered approach to business. The images of employees as self-organizing "Lego people," windsurfers who can quickly adapt to a changing environment, and innovators who fuse the caring of "heart" and the creativity of "brain" were selected as central ways of expressing the challenge.

In this way, the emerging strategy sought to break the self-sealing bubbles that were holding the organization into its old alignment, to provide the vital "jab" needed to provide life-enhancing air!

VISUAL IMAGING CAN PRODUCE POWERFUL RESULTS

Joe Arbuckle's intervention provides a wonderful illustration of "picture power" in practice. It shows how people can be encouraged to tap their creative insights. It also shows how these can then be molded into a strategy for change. We have here an illustration of the enormous creative power that rests within each and every organization. In looking at the images and murals that were produced, and in reflecting on the themes and messages they communicated, it's easy to forget that they were generated by a normal, everyday group of people, in a normal, everyday organization. There were no Picassos and no great philosophers or well-known storytellers among their number. They were regular people using basic insights and

imagery to communicate what they felt were fundamental truths about the state of their organization and its possibilities.

The case thus speaks to the power and possibilities of imaginization in practice. It illustrates how modes of visual imaging can break the constraints of an organization's conventional discourse and create the new space or new ground on which new developments can be built.

Rudderless boats

Headless horsemen

Firemen with defective hoses

Self-sealing bubbles

Repainted Volkswagens

Starships

Lego people

"Catch This" challenges

These and the other images illustrated in this case speak far louder than any words, concepts, and theories about the organization could ever do. They are unique, personal, and powerful. That's why this kind of process can provide such an effective means of mobilizing organizational change.