Facilitation in the Workplace

SEPTEMBER 1993, VOL. 5 NO. 4

EDGES

NEW PLANETARY PATTERNS

Case studies from

Participation Works

around the world

In the new book, *Participation Works*, edited by James Troxel, ICA consultants around the world tell true-life stories of how participation works in the boardrooms and on the plant floors of some of the world's largest corporations who use ICA's Technology of Participation (ToP). ToP methods are also used with public and voluntary sector organizations and communities. In the following pages, *Edges* presents excerpts from some of the chapters of *Participation Works*, Vol.1. These excerpts dealing with corporation case studies from Canada, Brazil, Singapore and India are intended as brief illustrations of the impact of participatory methods on company operations round the world.

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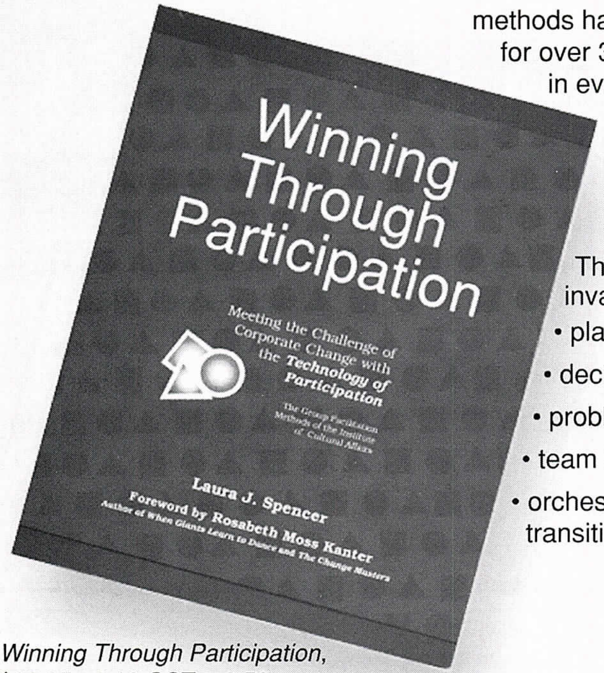
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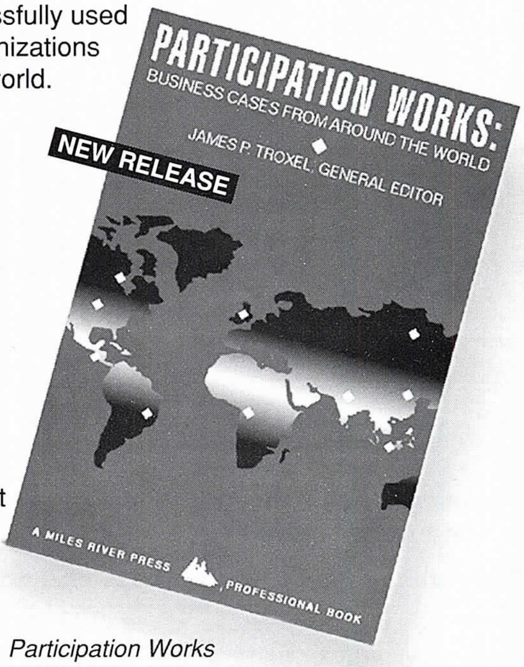
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Case studies from

Participation Works

around the world

Participation Works: Business Cases from Around the World *by James P. Troxel, General Editor; foreword by Antonia Shusta, Office of President, Household International; Miles River Press, Alexandria Virginia, 1993. Miles River Press is the publisher of* Participation Works, *to be released this fall, and has kindly allowed* Edges *to excerpt from various chapters in the book in this special preview for ICA members and* Edges *subscribers. You can order the book directly from Miles River Press by dialing 1-800-767-1501.*

CANADA: The Hudson's Bay Company Story

JO NELSON

Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) is Canada's oldest and one of its largest retailers. It was chartered in 1670 as the Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay. The company began as a fur-trading business that operated across the territory that was to become Canada, and opened up much of the continent to European exploration. The Hudson's Bay woollen blanket with its distinctive red, white and black stripes, an item developed for the fur traders, became known across North America around the turn of the century as a symbol of quality and stability. Early in this century, HBC turned its attention to retailing, which became its most important activity. Today, its three operating divisions cover the Canadian retail market across all price zones and from coast to coast. More than 400 retail stores across Canada bring Hudson's Bay Company to most of the population of Canada.

In the fall of 1991, the global recession was hitting Canada hard. The retail business in particular was experiencing the crunch. Hudson's Bay Company responded with a two-fold strategy to reduce costs and increase productivity. Computer system applications allowing faster response to customer demand had to be designed and delivered to clients more rapidly. The Information Services professionals needed to increase their effectiveness and productivity. The READI strategy, Retooling Application Developers in Information Services, was defined and given high priority to help computer application developers be more productive. Training in facilitating participatory processes to be used when meeting with their business clients or peers was seen to be a significant part of a larger retooling strategy. As Greg Harrison of Development Services pointed out in late 1991, "There is a hidden frustration in drawing together consensus. Meetings take too much time, and are difficult for everyone. Clients don't like being grilled for requirements, but often do not know how to make their needs understood to the computer experts. We need a way to marry the business client's need for systems support and the Information Services professional's need to deliver that in a more efficient way. We need to reduce the time it takes to deliver the solution."

When the READI campaign began to get underway in late 1991, Mary-Jane Jarvis-Haig, Director of Development Support, called ICA to ask whether the participatory processes taught by ICA might be tailored to meet the needs of designing computer applications to meet business needs. Mary-Jane and ICA worked together to design a course that would use examples and situations within the company to give employees skills for facilitating participatory design sessions and for other applications within their work.

She used the workshop method she had learned in an ICA Facilitation

Skills Seminar to define the scope and deliverables of the READI strategy. Management and staff attended workshops together to define what they felt was needed to become more productive. The process worked well. Mary-Jane remembers, "Groups surprised each other by having very similar requirements. Management was pleasantly surprised to hear of the common interest in standards to make the development process more consistent and efficient. The workshops gave the READI team a department-wide mandate."

In January 1992, the first Facilitation Skills course tailored to meet the READI project was offered. The three-day course demonstrated, explained and had staff practise finely tuned processes for leading discussions, workshops, and strategic planning sessions. Enthusiasm and commitment was high at the end of the course, as the practical applications became very evident.

> *"Facilitation has become a recognizable soft skill — a skill valuable to the company's productivity."*

Five training courses were held between January, 1992 and January 1993 under the READI initiative: four in Toronto and one in Montreal. Most of the sessions included several levels of management and staff and reflected the multicultural make-up of the company. This diversity promoted enhanced communication and demonstrated the effectiveness of the processes in working with widely differing perspectives.

As more and more of the management and employees attended the course, the focus began to expand. Not only was participation helpful for designing computer applications with clients, but it could also be used for solving everyday problems and as a tool in participatory management. Participants prepared sessions for determining project requirements with clients, for staff meetings, for one-to-one conversations, and for preparing reports and proposals.

The methods were taught experientially, using discussions and workshops on topics that everyone could participate in. Though the emphasis was on training, some of the plans that emerged during the demonstration sessions were acted upon when the sessions were finished. An objective-sharing session amongst managers and increased open communication between staff and management are two such examples. Workshop focus questions such as "What do we want to see going on in Information Services in five years?" elicited answers in which each group of participants created its own vision of the future of the division, the obstacles blocking it, and strategic directions for tackling the obstacles. An emerging consensus became apparent across all divisions and levels of the department. Participants were surprised and pleased that others had similar aspirations. Barriers began to dissolve.

Graduates of the course decided to set up a support network that would allow them to continue developing their facilitation skills. They wanted an easy way to call on each other for facilitation of workshops. Tim Willson created an electronic bulletin board list of all Facilitation Skills course participants. People began to use the bulletin board list to find facilitators. Soon a "user group" of facilitation skills began to meet to explore further development of their skills. Recently, a proposal to designate a "core group" of facilitators whose job descriptions would include facilitating participation in problem-solving meetings has been approved by management. As Mary-Jane notes, "Facilitation has become a recognizable soft skill — a skill valuable to the company's productivity."

The skill of facilitation has been used effectively by both staff and management in many situations. Bibi Karim, a senior systems analyst, tells of a typical facilitation experience.

"I was asked to facilitate the requirements gathering for a project to create a system to allow end-users access to real estate and taxation data. There was intensive preparation on IS's part since the participants (mainly managers) were very busy and skeptical about the structured participatory process or approach to the project. Naturally, we did not want them to feel that their time was being wasted. The focus question, 'How do you see yourself working more effectively today and what are your future requirements for information and business functions?' was well-thought out and it was issued in advance to the participants."

"Initially I was told that everyone could not attend. However, the focus question piqued their curiosity and all the participants showed up at the session. The participants were asked to come with a minimum of five responses to the focus question. They did spend the time preparing, and used their notes when the workshop started. The workshop method was the primary process used during the session. The meeting objectives were achieved, and all business requirements were addressed. In fact, the clients were quite enthusiastic and requested that we spend a full day rather than the planned one-half day. So we seized the momentum and synergy and continued working until our objectives were completed. The session delivered a revised data model with clear definitions reflecting the actual information this department used, and high-level process models, far beyond our original expectations. All clients were excited by the results and by how helpful they could be to each other. They found to their delight that they were all looking towards the same objective. New ideas were raised. At the end of the session, everyone was tired but still positive. This was my first 'work' experience using the workshop method. I felt that the process carried me along to some degree. In fact, it sold itself. In my opinion, preparation was a key factor for the success of this session."

Greg Harrison, manager of the IS Development Support department, reported about another group used the participatory planning process to enhance its teamwork.

"The most interesting facilitation I have been involved in is the staff-driven 'Development Services Visioning' exercise that I was asked to facilitate. The focus question for the process was: 'How will Development Services become the best possible Information and Business system delivery vehicle for the Hudson's Bay Company?' The process that we pursued was the standard ICA strategic planning process based on the workshop method, from visioning exercise to action planning. The group is currently completing the detailed definition of strategic directions and related action items."

"There are several interesting elements to the process. The group involved is a self-motivated, independent group of functional staff from different teams within the Development Services organization. The READI initiative, their observations of development services strengths and weaknesses, and their desire to deliver a solid, professional effort in their varied tasks prompted them to define what they felt Development Services could do to become 'the best.' The key individuals decided on a facilitated process because they had observed its relative success in other exercises. They felt that it was an appropriate method for getting objective, reasoned input on the topic of how to provide high-quality business and information systems quickly and efficiently. They were so motivated that much of the work effort was delivered outside of normal working hours. The facilitation framework allowed for a relatively smooth flow from visioning to obstacles to new directions to action planning even though the sessions dealing with the process were widely separated in time (several weeks to a month). This considerable time separation has been identified, however, as a weakness in this particular exercise."

Mary-Jane Jarvis-Haig said that staff and managers are now using participatory discussions and workshops to facilitate team meetings on how to resolve problems. A wider group of stakeholders is being involved. Issues are being seen in a broader perspective. Diverse groups are able to articulate obstacles more quickly, and to create effective strategies to deal with them. The usual territorialism is being addressed or minimized. Staff in the facilitation user-group meetings comment at how surprised they are at what they learn about each other when they use the techniques. They find themselves more sensitive to other points of view. Facilitators go into meetings much better prepared, which makes the meetings go much faster with more effective results. Even people who have a struggle with communication get good results when using this process.

Mary-Jane has been involved in the training of the HBC Information Services staff and management to facilitate participatory decision-making since 1991. She observes: "A unique aspect of the participatory processes being used by Information Services is that it is a grassroots movement within the company. Management has been supportive, but it is staff members that have decided to make this work by using participatory processes to facilitate team meetings and discussions on how to resolve problems. When they have run into obstacles, they have found ways around them and have not allowed themselves to be stopped. The ICA facilitation methods have allowed diverse groups to work together to a common end much faster, and therefore have increased the productivity of group work considerably."❖

BRAZIL: The Semco Story

JOHN BURBIDGE

"Eliminate boundaries inside the organization!" is a cry echoed by President and CEO of Levi Strauss and Company, Robert Haas. What he calls "the most rigid boundary of all"—that between workers and managers—must be redefined. Addressing the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco, he posed the questions, "Why can't some employees set production goals? Why can't they monitor plant efficiency? Why can't they hire and fire new workers on whom they are increasingly dependent? And why can't they benefit directly from their initiatives which result in higher profits?"

The Semco experience has been a strong motivator for other Brazilian companies moving toward more participatory management practices. In Brazil, the machinery manufacturer Semco S/A has already gone a long way to answering these very questions. Deciding that hierarchy was the single biggest obstacle to participatory management, Semco replaced its cumbersome pyramidal structure with three managerial circles and just four titles— counsellors, partners, associates, and co-ordinators—which included everyone in the organization. Furthermore, the corporation insists that certain important decisions are made by a company-wide vote.

Such was the case when Semco needed a larger plant for its marine division. Initially, it employed real-estate agents to search for possible plant sites, but the agents were unsuccessful. So Semco's top managers turned the job over to the employees. In one weekend, they came up with three factories for sale near the existing plant. The company then stopped work for a day and sent everyone to inspect the factories. Next, the workers voted and chose a plant the counsellors did not really want. Willing to trust the worker's wisdom, the company bought the building. Workers designed the layout and hired a top Brazilian artist to paint it. The result? In just four years, the division's productivity per employee increased 160 per cent and its market share jumped from 54 per cent to 62 per cent.

Commenting on the experience, company president Ricardo Semler said, "We accepted the employees' decision because we believe that in the long run, letting people participate in the decisions that affect their lives will have a positive effect on employee motivation and morale."❖

SINGAPORE: The Great Eastern Life Assurance Story

JOHN & ANN EPPS

In November 1992, The Singapore Business Times *in an article entitled "The Secret of Great Eastern Life's Success" observed that, "Dedication to training, efficient use of automation and information technology, and a people-oriented management philosophy are responsible for the success of The Great Eastem Life Assurance Company Ltd."*

"Excellence is a journey, not a destination" is the motto of Allen Pathmarajah, GE Life's Director and CEO, who came to the organization in 1984 from a consulting company (owned by a number of companies in the OCBC Group); he was also assistant to the Chairman of the OCBC Group. At that time he quickly initiated a three-pronged approach to seizing the opportunity for expansion in both Malaysia and Singapore: computerization, empowerment and training. The combined focus on high-tech and high-touch has made this a leading company in the life insurance industry.

When asked about his leadership "secrets," Pathmarajah responded that two elements were necessary: having a vision and displaying leadership by example. But vision in this sense has little to do with volume, bottom-lines or being number one. As Pathmarajah explains:

"We never talk about money or being number one as our goal. Goals, bottom lines, get old after awhile; values never do. And when you become number one, there is nowhere to go. Money and status will take care of themselves if you show respect for individuals, provide the best in customer service, and are excellent in everything you do. That's where we have to focus. If you focus on money, you will cut corners. Profit comes as the consequence of praise from customers. Life insurance is a beautiful business; we must do it with beauty."

A critical, if little practiced, role of the CEO is to be a symbol of the company—to manifest in personal style and operation what the company stands for, to be a sort of walking logo for the organization. The popular stereotype of the CEO, however, is of someone who is aloof, distant, who passes along generalized mandates and is too "busy" to get involved with the company's practical operations. The resistance to "top down" management is, in part, a reaction against this perversion of the leader's symbolic function.

Pathmarajah grasps this symbolic role of leader as a crucial function in the new environment of participation. He stays in hands-on contact with the staff in carrying out the business while still providing the distance and objectivity required to view the overall company picture.

continued on outside back cover

Adventures in Learning Partnerships

Special bulk offer for ICA members and Edges *subscribers.*

Editorial themes in our Adventures in Learning series have been sharply focused through our collaboration with The Conference Board of Canada and the Canadian Association for Adult Education. We intend to present exciting issues in 1994 in association with the Ontario Teachers Federation and several United Nations connections.

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November 1993:

Skills for Living

The November 1993 edition entitled Skills for Living is shaping up to be a very important issue, even by *Edges*' standards. It will feature:

Tom Peters' speech in Kuala Lumpur in 1993, guiding top CEOs to live and thrive in the chaos of radical restructuring, their only future.

Howard Gardner's seven distinct intelligences and how they can be applied to affect your work prospects and lifestyle.

The Journey Out of Joblessness: the heroic story of a battered psyche unfolds as a person loses a life's work and then goes on the quest for meaningful engagement.

The Employability Skills Profile of The Conference Board of Canada, a straightforward statement of skills needed in the 90s.

...and more.

The issue will expand on the dizzying possibilities opening up for education and learning today, now that the industrial paradigm is collapsing round our ears.

The importance of this special edition to Canadian society needs to be underlined. All public school board trustees, and some of Canada's premier companies including IBM Canada's Skill Dynamics Corporation, The Royal Bank of Canada, BC Tel and The Conference Board of Canada, will use it to help their own employees get an edge on the future.

Recently published:

Citizen Empowerment

Copies of the Citizen Empowerment edition are still available.

In it, Ralph Nader, North America's leading consumer advocate, urges peoples to action through his brand of broad-based citizen advocacy in his fiery Montreal speech.

Noam Chomsky, ever the rebel intellectual, puts our ideas of democracy on notice as he exposes a major contradiction between democracy and the unstated intention of the mainstream media in *Manufacturing Consent.*

Riane Eisler's long-awaited Crete Partnership Conference happens and Shirley Farlinger, from Toronto, reports on both the people and the politics at this major global conference.

Jean Houston, the internationally known psychologist, philosopher and scholar, links breakdown to breakthrough and encourages personal empowerment at its deepest level.

Edges' designer Ilona Staples runs Art with a Social Passion through the magazine in a mini picture gallery of masterworks by community-minded western artists.

March 1994:

Culture of Change

People who operate the education system are running fast to catch up with massive economic and social changes in society. In the non-formal sector, thousands of institutes, academies and schools provide alternatives to children and adults. Formal education institutions are responding more slowly but there are hopeful signs, nonetheless. The Ontario Teachers Federation launched the Creating a Culture of Change Project to speed up the rate of change within Ontario schools and to help teachers in the classroom.

In our March 1994 issue we hope to collaborate with the Ontario Teachers Federation to publish an edition that will be valuable to teachers, parents and administrators. ❖

INDIA: The Widia Story

JACK & JUDY GILLIS

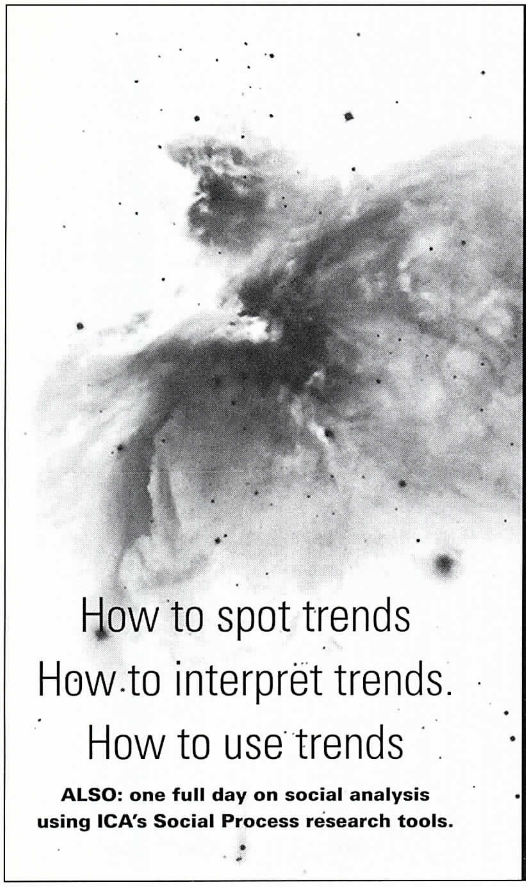
"To achieve Total Quality Management (TQM), one has to go through total organizational change," asserts R. Srinivasan, the Managing Director of Widia (India). The acid test is changing work attitudes so people will not want to produce anything but quality. Widia (India) specializes in the manufacture of carbide tools and specialty machines and employs 1,400 people of whom 1,000 are unionized.

Up until 1989, the top management was responsible for fixing targets which had to be met by various departments and executives. Orders flowed down from the top without any discussions involving those employees having to meet the targets. H.R. Gupta, Executive Director of Production, said, "We switched to 'management by quality policy deployment'. Targets are fixed after mutual discussion with managers and engineers, and the means of hitting the targets are worked out jointly. What we are working with has to do with process, not just results. ...I saw how Total Quality Management (TQM) could become the umbrella under which we could do everything—quality, involvement of people, new products, everything. But what we learned from ICA was the importance of the role of the facilitator in this process. That's been the real learning for us."

By 1991, style and role questions, particularly among mid-management, began to surface. Involving greater numbers of people in planning and implementation intruded on the previously held roles of managers. As managers faced the need to change their styles of operating, many welcomed the change enthusiastically, some took it as a temporary fad, and some were confused. Mid-level managers developed skills in leading workshops and focused discussions so that management involved workers in analysing product defects and in generating ideas, for instance, scrap reduction to cut costs.

Today at Widia (India) there are 25 quality improvement teams and 10 quality circles actively working. Significant improvements have been made in the short period of three years since the introduction of CONQUEST, the Widia (India) TQM program. Inventory levels of stores and consumables—a measure of good planning systems resulting in less money tied up in supplies—dropped from 138 days in 1989 to 90 days in 1991. The 1992 target was 60 days. Gross profits increased from 9 per cent to 11.5 per cent of turnover, or total sales. Return on investment increased from 24 per cent to 31 per cent. Work in process—the time it takes for people and resources to manufacture any product from start to finish—reduced its handling time from 90 days to 68 days. Scrap in the tool plant was reduced from 6.8 per cent to 3.8 per cent. Variable expenses were reduced from 29 per cent to 22 per cent. The average number of hours of in-house training per employee has increased from 16 hours a year to 32.

TQM only thrives in an organization that believes in teamwork results, participative style, customer orientation and product innovation. Such an organization will cherish values of mutual trust, openness, care and respect for individuals, as well as commitment to excellence. In these companies, people will not hesitate to expose problems, but instead will develop the habit of solving problems immediately, on the basis of data. Such a transformation can only happen when people celebrate success, live out of meaningful values, and experience their life goals and company goals as one.❖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The Great Eastern Life Assurance Story

continued from inside centre spread

Pathmarajah spends many weekends meeting agents in branches throughout Malaysia to keep abreast of developments and to talk with staff. Even as early as 1987 during the first of many strategic planning consultations led by Ann and John Epps, Pathmarajah, or AJP, as he is affectionately called, extolled the values of participation and encouraged staff to say anything they wished about the company and their work during these sessions. Speaking out is not a normal practice in Asian culture, so initially participants in these sessions were slow to respond. But as they realized that this was a serious invitation, candid and constructive comments began to flow. The upshot was a frank and healthy discussion that resulted in a solid consensus about the company direction.

As an involved leader, Pathmarajah never fails to reiterate the company mission and philosophy. Although session participants have heard it all many times before, his sincerity of delivery and obvious commitment to a participative company culture give his statements an appeal that is highly motivating. His belief in the importance of life insurance and his respect for individuals within the organization are visible and genuine.❖

New Video Release: *Winning Through Participation*

(VHS Video - 25 minutes. $24.95+ 1.75 GST and $1.95 for postage in Canada.)

ICA Canada has produced an animated video, based on the book *Winning Through Participation*, which takes viewers step by step through a method for leading group discussions and for facilitating workshops that lead to action. The theory and applications of the Focused Conversation Method and the Workshop Method are presented by characters recognizable in any workplace. The video is intended for: 1. those who have the book *Winning Through Participation* but do not have ready access to ICA courses; 2. for participants of the Group Facilitation course who want a refresher. ICA Trainers and Consultants will find it a valuable tool for courses and marketing.

ICA Global Conference 1994

The 1994 ICA Global Conference will be held in Lonavala, the lovely hill station near Pune and Bombay, India from October 24-30, 1994. The conference will focus on theory and practical applications of the culture of participation in the public, private, volunteer and local sectors. Make 1994 your year to visit fascinating India.

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NEW PLANETARY PATTERNS

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Statement of Purpose The mission of *Edges* is to help people manage change in their lives by communicating the effectiveness of current developments in education and learning. *Edges* magazine is primarily devoted to contemporary trends and approaches in consumer education and personal learning.

A wave of change sweeping through societies has shaken the foundations of civilization. Every facet of existence is being challenged to evolve into new planetary patterns of knowing, doing and being. The Institute of Cultural Affairs weaves new relations between individuals, organizations and communities. At the core of ICA's work is spirit, sustained by the myths and techniques of many cultures, helping to shape social transformation. ICA's research, education, organizational change and international linking programs work together to elicit new planetary patterns.

The opinions in *Edges* articles do not necessarily represent the policies or views of ICA Canada.

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