

Stupendous Siete
SEEDS OF COLLABORATION: THE
CALENDAR GIRLS NEXT CHAPTER

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“I love, I love, I love my calendar girl, yeah-sweet calendar girl.”

– N. Sedaka



The words made famous in 1961 by singer Neil Sedaka as he sang the chart-topping hit “Calendar Girl” exemplifies the popularity of the iconic calendar. Since then countless women and men have posed in many a themed calendar. When eleven scared but determined women in Yorkshire County, England needed to raise money for a noble cause in 1998, they brainstormed how to raise funds through a calendar. The women belonged to a staunch ladies club in Knapely known as the Women’s Institute (WI). Although the WI was originally established in 1915 to “revitalize rural communities and to encourage women to become more involved in producing food during the First World War” (Women’s Institute, 2011), a group of women turned this traditional organization on its head by posing nude in a fundraising calendar.

In February 1998, WI member, Annie, discovered that her husband, John, was diagnosed with leukemia. Her good friend and fellow WI member, Chris, wanted to help. So Chris came up with the idea to create a calendar to raise money for a new couch in the cancer ward of the local hospital. In the past, the WI had produced calendars that were traditional and yielded little profit. However, Chris and Annie generated a novel idea to produce a nude calendar knowing that the WI Board of Trustees cherished their good reputation in the community. Having members bearing it all could be perceived as a travesty. So how did Chris convince her fellow WI friends and Board of Trustees to join this cause? How did a group of middle-aged conservative women evolve into Calendar Girls? And how would that impact the local WI chapter in the future? This research paper will compare and contrast the leadership styles, group structure, social interdependence, conflicts, controversies, and collaboration methods of the

Knapely WI (or local WI) versus the Calendar Girls, and make recommendations on how the Knapely WI can thrive with a new cohesive focus going forward.

Reading the Recipes of Leadership



The term leadership is described as “the position or function of a leader; ability to lead; an act or instance of leading; guidance; direction” (Dictionary.com, 2011). The leadership style of the local (WI) was clearly autocratic with a hierarchical structure. The WI members voted certain members into higher positions. When WI members had ideas or suggestions, they had to be submitted to the WI president and Board of Trustees in a public setting. If approved, the proposed change would go into effect. The upper levels in the hierarchy singularly controlled the direction, tone, and atmosphere of the WI. In autocratic leadership, decisions are dictated without involving other group members (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). The WI members rarely, if ever, challenged decisions made by their elected members as the stigma and fear of being labeled as a troublemaker loomed over their heads. Being labeled thusly meant isolation or censure from the WI. Indeed, even the seating arrangement at the meetings conveyed a classroom style where the leaders (like teachers) sat in a position of authority in front of all the members (like students). The norms of conversation, adherence to specific rules and regulations, even proper decorum were reinforced by the watchful eye of the WI leadership at the head of the class.

The leadership style of the Calendar Girls was completely opposite of the WI. The honorary leader, Chris Harper, and later co-leader, Annie, were never officially elected. They were politically-incorrect democratic leaders. In the beginning, the Calendar Girls were terrified to approach the WI about a nude calendar. As a natural reaction to the previously described problems within the local WI, and the resulting boredom and lack of free exchange of ideas, Chris and Annie were quickly identified as early leaders of the eventual Calendar Girls. Throughout the film, during various times of conflict or

disagreement, they demonstrated that “leaders get the best from others by not building fires under people but by building the fire within them” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p.293). In the storming phase, the women openly discussed creative ideas. If members disagreed with their honorary leaders, they were not ostracized for doing so. In fact, they were encouraged to give constructive criticism and suggestions during brainstorming sessions. In the end, the Calendar Girls decided on the direction of the project as a team. By incorporating a democratic leadership style the production of the first calendar, and those thereafter, have been successful. As of current date, the Calendar Girls have raised 1.5 million British Pounds for Leukemia Research (Pugh, 2011), the equivalent of \$2,416,655.40 US Dollars.

Preparing the Soil of Group Structure



When considering group structure, Johnson and Johnson (2009) observe that, “Two aspects of group interaction are especially important to understanding how a group is structured: differentiated roles and integrating norms” (p. 15). Differentiated roles in the Knapely WI (Barton, Mackie & Cole, 2003) were featured as traditional, formal and highly disciplined in its long tenured membership, elected president and single secretary. Members’ roles were to represent the group positively in community events and attend weekly meetings without fail. On the other hand, the Calendar Girls were a reflection of a collaborative, self-initiated co-leadership who had recruited members through shared interest in a high purpose (Barton, et al.). Members embraced their roles as active participants in consensus-building discussions, proud rogue members of the local WI, and demonstrated their commitment by posing for their respective month in the calendar.

The second aspect of group structure, group norms, serves to integrate team members’ efforts into a collective whole (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). A fascinating paradox existed in the group norms of the Knapely WI, in that disciplined, long-held norms meant to integrate and unify members’ efforts actually

served to stifle member creativity and produce disillusionment. The movie clearly assigned this fault to the founding bureaucracy of the National Women's Institute Committee. On the contrary, the Calendar Girls practiced simplistic norms similar to those recommended by William Isaacs (1999), "Listening, Respecting, Suspending and Voicing." With ease, these friends did their best to honor the best intentions of their group. Given the bonds created by such a level of consideration, this group was exceedingly successful at incorporating norms to become an effective group (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

"Observers of groups who want to know how a group truly functions look beyond the group's unique features to its basic structure, a stable pattern of interaction among members" (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, pp. 14-15). It is interesting to note that the pattern of interaction among members of the Knapely WI was stable although not conducive to member engagement. Examples of this arose early in the movie during a montage of Knapely WI weekly meetings demonstrating the routine welcome by the president, a guest presentation to a tepid member-audience and little opportunity for interaction or discussion among members (Barton, et al., 2003). As the Calendar Girls embarked on the inspired project to create a fundraising calendar for a local hospital, their group engaged in a communication of informal, friendly banter among themselves that moved quickly from one to another, got to the heart of issues, and ended in a lighthearted resolve. The fascinating point of comparison is that the existence of the pattern was not the whole measure of group function. It was also the presence of positive social interdependence within that framework that brought the interactions to life.

Weaving the Threads of Social Interdependence



The juxtaposition of the positive social interdependence of the Calendar Girls with the little to no interdependence of the Knapely WI members is like the bright sunflower that stands apart from the black and white pictures of the calendar. Social interdependence is based on group goals, group

purpose, group vision, and mutual problem solving. Positive social interdependence happens when members become aware of the *dynamic whole* of the group and understand that one member's actions and involvement affects the other members (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

It's clear that the Calendar Girls had reached a sense of the dynamic whole when Chris and Annie presented the calendar idea at the Knapely WI meeting. When Marie, the Knapely WI president, asked if the calendar was another one of Chris's crazy ideas, Chris responded by saying, "I'm going to make sure this one turns out okay. Because it's for John. It was inspired by John, and it's for John. And it's because of John. And no matter what you might think of the idea, you're looking at January!" (Barton, et al., 2003). The women involved in the project stood one-by-one and revealed their support of the nude calendar. It was at this point that they committed their support of one another, publicly aligning themselves with Chris and Annie, identifying with the higher purpose of the group and exhibiting social interdependence, "when individuals share common goals and each individual's outcomes are affected by the actions of the others" (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, p.91). The growth of the social interdependence of the Calendar Girls led them to promotive interaction which "occurs as individuals encourage and facilitate each other's efforts to accomplish the group's goals" (Johnson & Johnson, p.92).

In contrast, the Knapely WI chapter showed little to no interdependence. The sense of calling to the group was based on obligation. Like Chris, many women were members because their mother wanted them to be. The Knapely WI did not exhibit promotive interaction in "challenging each other's conclusions and reasoning in order to promote curiosity, motivation to learn, reconceptualization of what one knows, higher-quality decision making, greater insight into the problem being considered" (Johnson and Johnson, 2009, pg.92). When Chris suggested the nude calendar, the disciplined, long-held norms of the Knapely WI bred a fear that the actions of a few individuals would obstruct the mission and goals of the group. This fear was obvious when Marie felt obligated to approach the national president about the Calendar Girls' project, clearly aligning herself with the formal norms of national WI instead of with the women of her local chapter.

The Calendar Girls were WI members, but functioned on a voluntary, passion-oriented basis, instead of the membership-driven, obligation-oriented basis of the WI. The Calendar Girls emerged from the close friendship between Chris and Annie and their passion to do something in John's honor. When the idea started lacking details and direction, Chris and Annie called in a facilitator, Lawrence the photographer. The fellow Calendar Girls' trust in Chris and Annie's judgment led them to listen to and allow Lawrence's ideas, which lied outside the realm of the WI, to come to fruition. His applied insight demonstrated that they were willing to "take the perspectives of others more accurately than individuals engaged in competitive or individualistic efforts" (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, p.93). Lawrence provided process gain to the group's ideas by bridging the Calendar Girls' ideas with John's love of sunflowers and the symbols of the WI's interests, and the group accepted his suggestions.

The social interdependence of the Calendar Girls is like the sunflower in that "every stage of their growth is more beautiful than the last" (Barton, et al., 2003). They shared joys, concerns, ideas,

struggles and laughter as they worked towards their goals, and it was their ability to see each individual as an integral part of the completion of the project that gave shape to their group identity and helped them collaborate well with one another. The local WI, like the black and white part of the photo, was stuck following rules and regulations which did not recognize the uniqueness of their chapter or the uniqueness of each member. This ultimately stifled the social interdependence and collaboration of the members; thus keeping them from experiencing their dynamic whole.

Sowing the Seeds of Collaboration



The success of the Calendar Girls did not come haphazardly, although it may have appeared so at times. Rather, the growth of collaboration within the team fostered the positive interdependence that enabled them to achieve their goals. Ironically, the rigid and un-collaborative local WI was historically unsuccessful at reaching all but the most basic goals.

Collaboration is defined as consisting of “dynamic, interwoven, and disciplined exchanges of knowledge and information, participative decision making, and co-created solutions to emerging problems” (Beyerlein, Freedman, McGee, & Morgan, 2003, p. 15). While the local WI routinely shared knowledge and information at its meetings, the communication was one-way and the content was seen as irrelevant by most members. Johnson and Johnson (2009) describe one-way communication as “unsatisfactory for the receivers” (p. 157). Participative decision-making and co-created solutions (Johnson & Johnson, 2009), were both highly discouraged by Marie, the local WI president.

The Calendar Girls’ collaboration also stood in contrast to the lack of collaboration in the local WI—much like the color of the sunflowers stood out on the black and white calendar photos. Members exchanged information in truly organic ways: on the hill-top after t’ai-chi, in the middle of a furniture

store, on the golf course, in parking lots, and while playing the organ at a wedding. The shared goal of making the calendar a success drove the clear and honest communication. Or as Johnson and Johnson explain, “group goals breathe life into group members’ hopes and dreams and enable them to see the exciting possibilities of their joint efforts” (2009, p. 71). This as-needed, word of mouth communication was much more effective than many communication plans. It enabled the group to make required decisions.

Throughout the project many decisions, large and small, needed to be made. At first, Annie and Chris made most decisions together; however the group quite naturally knew when decisions required more input. They maintained flexibility when matching “decision-making procedures with the needs of the situation” (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, p. 556), such as when deciding how to set up the photographs so as to preserve modesty, as well as who would pose for which month.

The Calendar Girls also showed an aptitude for co-created solutions to emerging problems. When the local WI initially challenged the idea, the members stood together as a group, exemplifying their cohesiveness and determination to make the calendar a success. As Kouzes and Posner explain, “to get extraordinary things done, people have to rely on each other” (2007, p. 233); all the members had the courage to unite in the face of disapproval. They also creatively worked together to find a sponsor and then promote the calendar. Their collaboration was perhaps most glorious in the photo shoot when members supported one another through their apprehension during their individual poses and inspired each other in line with the creativity and purpose of the cause. The Calendar Girls clearly exhibited collaboration that enabled them to reach their goals; however as we will examine in the next section, the group was not without conflict.

Mixing and Managing the Ingredients of Conflict



“Not everything that is faced can be changed but nothing can be changed until it is faced” – James Baldwin (Johnson, & Johnson, 2009, p.377).

Johnson & Johnson (2009) define controversy as “the conflict that arises when one person’s ideas, information, conclusions, theories, and opinions are incompatible with those of another person, and the two seek to reach an agreement” (p.323-324). The contrast between the local WI and the Calendar Girls in regards to how conflicts and controversy were managed (and encouraged or discouraged) was evident throughout the film. Within this film, we saw conflict at all hierarchies and complexities. Frakes (n.d.) posits that the level or stages of conflict are: “organizational, cultural, departmental (team), level, and individual.” Barriers, both internal and external, presented themselves in various forms, but what differed significantly between the groups’ behavior was how those barriers were overcome in the interest of progress. Positive interdependence was achieved within the Calendar Girls, while the local WI simply existed. So what factors and influences led to this stark difference and what can we learn from it?

Early in the film, we saw evidence of an existence or development of a sub-group, when Chris asked a fellow WI member at the tent festival, “Whose side are you on, Brutus?” (Barton, et al., 2003). It was clear that some members of the local WI already identified outside of the group. There was no emphasis on collaboration and members appeared to be apathetic, resulting in a kind of absent cooperativism that didn’t challenge the status quo. “Too much conflict can immobilize an organization by channeling the efforts of its members into unproductive activities, but too little conflict may encourage complacency and lethargy” (Morgan, 2006, p. 199). Constructive conflict was not encouraged, leading to a lack of innovation and creativity within the local WI. The new idea for the next calendar was simply told to the group in a meeting by the local chapter president, and met with more apathy and boredom than engagement and excitement. “Since the general or prevailing opinion on any subject is rarely or

never the whole truth, it is only by the collision of adverse opinion that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied” - John Stewart (Johnson, & Johnson, 2009, p.323). There was little structured controversy within the National WI or the local chapter. “If a group is to make effective decisions and solve problems competently, controversies should not only be encouraged and sought out, but deliberately structured” (Johnson, & Johnson, p.327). We clearly witnessed a culture of exclusion in regards to decision-making within the WI organization and local WI chapter, as well as a focus on individual, autocratic power. Marie attempted to direct conflict in a competitive way with the Calendar Girls’ leaders, Annie and Chris, both at home and at the National WI meeting, without much success. For the rest of the local WI members, it was understood that conflict was to be avoided, therefore the much needed controversy was suppressed.

Within the Calendar Girls, we saw evidence that supports Johnson & Johnson’s (2009) claim that “disagreements and arguments among individuals with diverse information and ideas are all important aspects of gaining creative insight” (p.340). Both Annie and Chris mobilized many resistant members of the local WI, enlisting and negotiating their buy-in, and ultimately securing their membership in the Calendar Girls. We saw evidence of integrative negotiating as Chris and Annie each appealed to specific reluctant women to sign on to the controversial project. “Compared with concurrence seeking, debate, and individualistic efforts, controversy typically produces group productivity, individual achievement and quality of decision making” (Johnson, & Johnson, p.339). By introducing the idea of the nude calendar, a necessary controversy was introduced that slowly, but surely led to positive interdependence. The controversy united the group, empowered the individuals, and aided them in making effective decisions such as photographer selection and prospective months for each woman.

Consensus-building is a key aspect of constructive conflict resolution. When Chris delivered an impassioned speech in front of the entire National WI conference and influenced the assembly about the purpose of project, she began to turn the tide of public opinion and successfully navigated a potential roadblock to success for the Calendar Girls. She handily negotiated a distributive issue, “where one member benefits only if the other member agrees to make a concession” (Johnson, & Johnson, 2009, p.378). This was the tipping point of the film, allowing the calendar project to proceed. But it was not the end of conflict. The ongoing partnership/friendship between Chris and Annie unveiled tensions and conflict as the group headed to Hollywood to promote the calendar. Throughout the remainder of the film we witnessed Chris and Annie working out a conflict through a variety of approaches. There was, at times, some avoidance of conflict as each psychologically wrestled with the appropriate ways to address concerns. We ultimately witnessed the type of conflict management strategy that is indicative of the lifelong close relationship the two women shared - one of dual concern, or “concern for self and concern for other” (Johnson, & Johnson, p.374). Interestingly, the two women utilized the five basic strategies (based on earlier work by Blake and Mouton, and developed by Johnson and Johnson) of the turtle (withdrawing), the owl (confronting with an emphasis on problem solving), the shark (forcing), the fox (compromising), and the teddy bear (smoothing) as they worked out the tensions that arose from increased media scrutiny and their newly found, sometimes unwanted, “star” status (Johnson, & Johnson, p.374). The primary decisions they made however, were reflective of the problem solving owl conflict strategy whereby they chose to listen and provide candid feedback towards their shared vision.

Focusing the Lens and Finding the Light



The paradox of leadership and influence is that in order to gain it, you have to give it away (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). When local WI chapter President, Marie, ceded power to the Calendar Girls to pursue their unique method of fundraising, unprecedented sales resulted, which benefited the organization and the community. The process gain of uniting the efforts of the group and sub group became much more than the sum of its parts.

Although the calendar project was very successful, it would be a stretch to attempt to utilize its momentum to convince the Knapely WI leadership to change their hierarchical practices toward a shared, strategic approach overnight. However, after Marie's television statement following the thrill of the record calendar sales that the WI sought to empower women, the organization may be ready for a change. By building upon her proclamation and publicly recognizing and celebrating the accomplishments of the Calendar Girls, the leadership may be primed to revisit the steps that got them there. Since effective, sustainable change requires people to "collectively explore each other's assumptions, seek and expand common ground, share a desired future, and jointly take ownership of the solutions to the issues at hand" (Holman, Devane & Cady, 2007, p.3), it may take the mix and selection of several OD initiatives to bring the two groups to greater effectiveness. Both small and large, short-term and long-term OD interventions might be needed to create a new pattern of collaboration, positive social interdependence and distributed leadership for the Knapely WI (see Figure 1).

Capitalizing on the high of the blockbuster calendar project, a quick hit intervention could be a Technology of Participation (ToP) method using ORID (Objective, Reflective, Interpretive and Decisional) questioning (Oyler & Harper, 2007, p. 151) about the calendar project and how it relates to the WI's ongoing mission. "Any change initiative necessarily begins with a group of people who grasp the need for change. The focus on voice, cohesion, and action represents an ecumenical approach to change theory and practice: inclusive rather than exclusive; collective rather than directive; effective rather than

resistant” (Axelrod, Axelrod, Jacobs, & Beedon, 2006, p.4). The ORID session(s) would be deemed successful if two-way feedback was provided amongst membership and leaders, and if set action plans were established and measured.

Expanding upon the ORID sessions, Dialogue and Deliberation (D & D) can be used to collectively learn from the perspectives and experience of all parties, not just on the calendar project, but also the local WI chapter’s experiences throughout the past year. Critical to D & D is the establishment of communication ground rules and storytelling to foster a range of views. This process could “build and strengthen relationships, bridge gaps, resolve conflicts, generate innovative solutions to problems, inspire collaborative action, and more” (Heierbacher, 2007, p. 103). Evidence of an effective D & D initiative in this situation might include additional round table discussions and the establishment of new communication norms and processes.

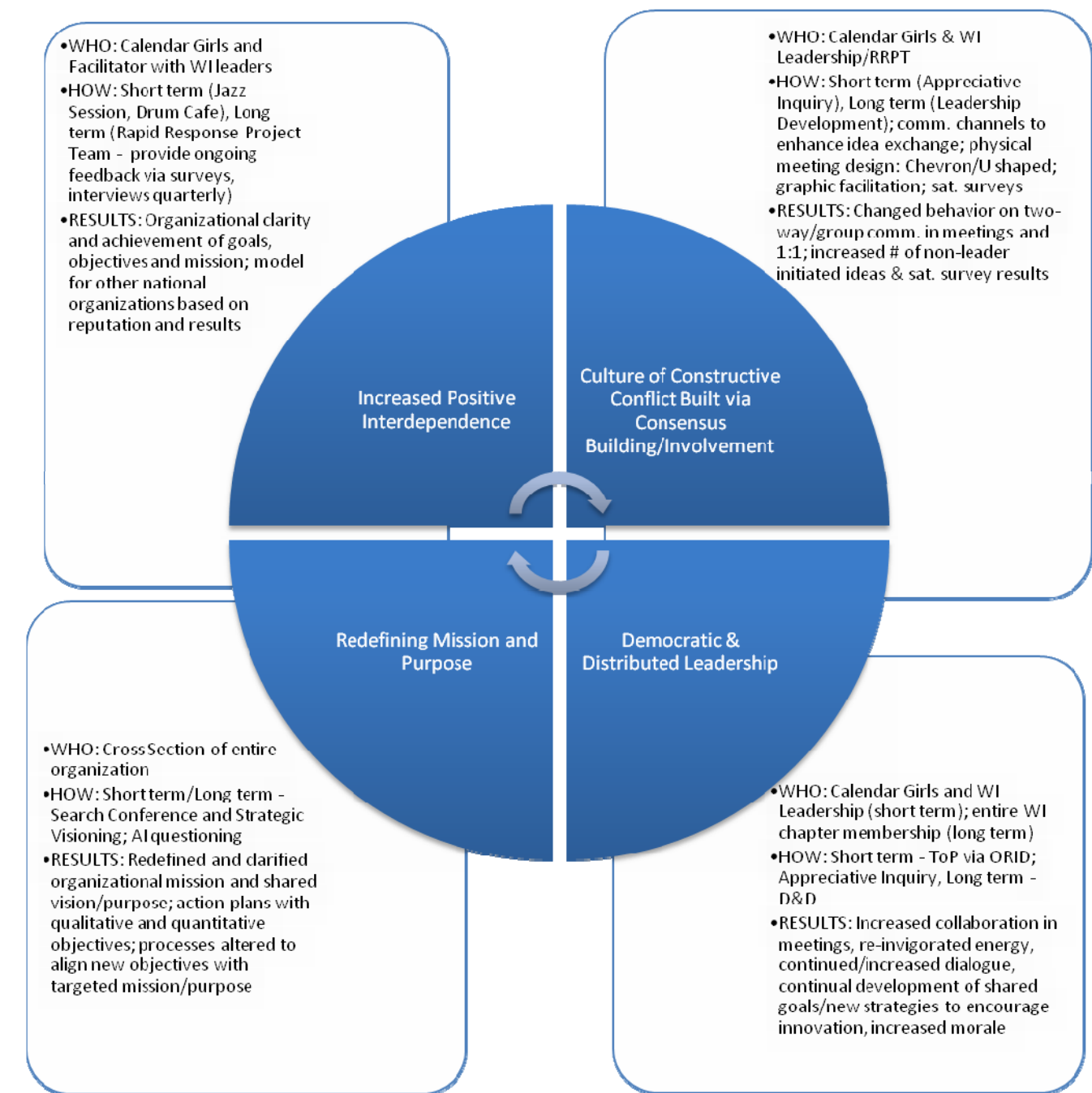
Sometimes it is hard to focus the lens of the camera on ourselves and our own flaws, as the Calendar Girls discovered, especially in the nude! Therefore, rather than looking in the mirror, it may prove an easier first step for the local WI leadership to delegate the creation of educational sessions to an internal project team. This could plant the seeds for a mini Rapid Results initiative which could build on the “let’s try it” approach (Holman, et al., 2007, p. 686) for more engaging and relevant meetings. A quick, fun session could be a Jazz or Drum Café session which would enable local WI members to adapt the existing music in their meetings to a new paradigm shift of appreciating collaboration and social interdependence. Program evaluations and proactive surveys by the project team could provide immediate feedback on the relevance of the content and effectiveness of the meetings.

Once local WI leaders and members get accustomed to asking each other for authentic feedback, there are many methods for the organization to further assist in the development of a truly committed, cooperative group. Leveraging the use of surveys, additional feedback could evolve to soliciting on both the content and congruence of programs and other outcomes, including the means by which chapter results are achieved. For example, Johnson and Johnson’s (2009) Level of Acceptance/Trust Questionnaires, (p.117-118) could be utilized to measure progress and help the group stay on target.

Ultimately, the success of the local WI will depend upon the alignment of the members’ passion, commitment and talents with the shared mission of the group (Johnson and Johnson, 2009; Kouzes and Posner, 2007). Utilizing Appreciative Inquiry, questions about the vision and goals for the organization, such as, “What is our local chapter like when we are at our best?” and “What are we most passionate about?” will help define an energizing, meaningful purpose for its members. Through the implementation of a strategic planning session, such as a Strategic Visioning, the local WI could integrate the stellar history of the organization with the innovative calendar project success towards an integrated, motivating vision and mission. The organization’s focus on increased positive interdependence, a culture of constructive conflict and involvement, democratic and distributed leadership, and a redefined mission and purpose shared by all could generate and sustain the needed change. The Knapely WI’s organizational camera lens could finally evolve from an autocratic, black or white perspective, to that of complementary, diversified colors, creating unique and captivating results.

Much like the sunflower finds the light of the sun, the Calendar girls provide the light that the WI organization needs to grow and evolve into a truly remarkable, vibrant organization.

Figure 1



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