THE THEORETICS AND PRACTICES OF FACILITATING
STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHOPS

This document contains two separate but related parts. The first part is the transcript of a talk given by Jim Troxel to a seminar at the ICA on the topic of Strategic Planning in November of 1991 in Chicago. The second part is a reflection on the talk by Jim that goes deeper into the more theoretical aspects of the ICA's approach to Strategic Planning. This paper was done as part of Jim's Master work at DePaul University, Chicago, IL.

TRANSCRIPT OF A TALK ON THE ICA VERSION OF FACILITATING STRATEGIC PLANNING GIVEN DURING AN ICA TRAINING PROGRAM IN 1991

My function here for the next period of time is to help us think through the philosophy as well as some of the practices of this version of strategic planning. I might say as a preface that people try to pigeonhole us and/or this technology somewhere and it is kind of hard to do. People come to the training and wonder "Is this a training thing?" and it is more than training. "Is this an O.D. - organizational development - thing?" Well, yes, it is that, but it is not that and we are not too sure what it is.

Clearly there is a movement today in corporate America as well as most of organizational life in this society of a more participatory environment and things like doing group planning is becoming more and more popular. We cut our teeth is this, frankly, in community development activity. We didn't start in the private sector with this. We started

actually on the West side of Chicago, in the 5th City neighborhood in East Garfield Park. It sort of happened that we came in as a group of wide-eyed liberals in the 60's - going to change, love and cure the ills of the world, at least poor people. And they said, "Not so fast, you honkey." This is before partnership and collaboration were even invented. If we are going to do this and we're going to do it our way," frankly.

So the technology was birthed at the grassroots level. We had the privilege of exporting that technique around the world in a lot of Third World rural development settings throughout the 70's. That's where the ICA really was. You've heard of the Back of the Yards neighborhood in Chicago. We were sort of back behind the back of the back of the back in remote places in rural India, Africa, Latin America, refining this technique, these technologies. And then, only as we came back to the States in the late 70's and piggy-backed on the back of the Bicentennial with a series of town meetings - one day quick and dirty workshops. It caught hold of a lot of people's imagination. It was at the front end of the movement toward local initiative in this country. I think that to a certain extent, we helped catalyze that movement. That got us into all sorts of - well, in fact we facilitated town meetings, which is a version of what we are going to do today, at least one in every county in the United States - that's about 3500. So we got ourselves very acquainted with what's going on across this country.

That helped us to focus to doing some demonstration projects in rural development and also organizational development. As more people heard of this they began to ask if we could do this for their company, their church. What we were doing as our charitable work grew into an entrepreneurial activity. We still maintain, here in Chicago at least, doing a lot

of our work for, like, the school reform movement in this town; we are assisting the local schools efforts, the Local School Councils. At the same time we are selling essentially the same service to your Fortune 500s, you know. We don't charge them what we charge the local schools and hopefully the two will balance out and we can survive that way.

But that is part of our mission, to try to increase the fullness of human development in our world. In fact, the technologies of participation, which is the substance of the book, which are basically our social methodologies, is but one of a three-legged technologies of the human factor: the other two being the intellectual methods (we have a whole battery of methodologies for learning) and the third one are the spirit methods (individual self-esteem, vocational significance, and methods of meditation and contemplation, as well, a lot of which we borrow from other people). So, just put that sort of context in appreciation.

So I think what we feel that what we are doing, the edge of what we are doing right now, is that we are in the arena, in terms of technologies or participation, that is, we are in the arena of, what I would refer to, organizational transformation. We feel as if every organization we encounter is going through not only a transition but a major transformation. Part of it has to do with society as a whole but it also probably has to do with the uniqueness of each organization we encounter. Strategic planning can be a catalyst, a midwife, a focussing of the transformation process that is already going on There are other things, other techniques, other - I hate the word - interventions, other things that could be done and need to be done to further the real human transformation of organizations. In our experience, this is really a key one - strategic planning, that is. But I want to put that in that context.

Now because it is strategic planning, it is, therefore, planning. It behooves me to share with you of our thinking as to how does planning happen in a generic sense and how it is applied to strategic planning.

Planning is the capacity to hold a dialogue between two ancient points of a dialogue. [Diagram #1] One between the whole movement toward being concerned about "realism" in dialogue with the concern for "idealism." In other words, planning is about finding ways to hold the balance, or tension if you please, between being grounded in actual, real current reality and, at the same time, being thrown toward the future states of affairs with your resident hopes and dreams for your ideal utopia, your aspirations, your goals, etc. Of course, in terms of ancient Western civilization, this would be your Platonic thinking and here would be your Aristotelian thinking with Socrates having the dialogue between the two great thrusts throughout history. This dialogue between idealism and realism can be traced through Western civilization and find it at ply into the current day.

Another way, in terms of your thinking capacities, this is your inductive and this is the deductive way of thinking. I sometimes get them confused but inductive is sort of - the logic of your thinking is induced from the real and deductive you deduced from the ideal patterns that exists in the world, the ideal state of affairs. Finding a way to hold the balance.

Sartre, most recently, with revolutionary thinking - you've got to be dodging real bullets and, at the same time, dreaming the socialist world. A good revolutionary has his or her foot in both. If you fall into the trap of idealist thinking, that life has to be some other way

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than it is, you are going to be burned out real quick. In fact, some people say that a cynic is an idealist who has been burnt out. In other words, reality is holding this tension.

We as human beings have the great capacity to have - we can anticipate, we have the consciousness of anticipatory thinking, unlike most of the rest of the animal kingdom. That is what sets us apart. So, having that kind of dialogue is important. Now, therefore, strategic planning is having that kind of thinking, is in this kind of mode - holding this dialogical tension.

It seems as if where you always step, sometimes this goes under different names. The card here is the SWOT analysis - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats. This is very important - a shared understanding of our current situation is needed. If there is not a common understanding of our situation, then when we go to do our vision workshop we are coming at it from different perspectives and that makes pulling together a shared vision much more difficult because we have a different data base. When you are doing community development, you have to have your demographics, etc. I think a mission statement, to some degree, is a part of this. Be that as it may. A data base.

Having gotten your data base, then you are ready to jump over here and talk about "What's our Vision?" Usually, in the participatory process, while the data base can be compiled separately, sometimes it can be the first workshop, the first morning of the retreat, or something like that. You don't have to dwell on it. It is just the stuff - it's not significant insofar as it's just the stuff.

The first real workshop and what we are going to be sharing with you here is the vision workshop. "What future do we want? What do we want?" That is a generic question. It can be tailored to all sorts of manifestations depending on your overall focus question. The emphasis here is See - "what do we see in place as the end result of all of our labors?" I can't think of doing a vision workshop for any less than five years. I think two years is moving more toward the strategic. Five years - it needs to be just out of the reach of what you can actually think about what you are going to do next week. But it can't be so far out of reach. We worked with Sunstrand company and a five-year vision was not pushy enough for them because the way there business works they already know their income five years from now, for example. It was not a very stretch of the imagination. The vision has be a stretch of the imagination to a certain extent. For them we had to talk about what their vision looked like for the year 2000, which had some very interesting kind of features to it - to talk about it in that way.

In the next workshop, it focusses back against reality, we call it the Contradictions workshop. If the modifier for vision is "practical" or "shared", the modifier for contradictions is "underlying". Now the first step, you ask people in the contradictions workshop is "what are the blocks, the deterrents, the impediment, the things standing in the way of realizing, or fulfilling, our vision?" Some people say "Isn't that a little redundant? We've already done this from just looking at the issues" in the SWOT analysis. Here is the surface analysis. What we are trying to do now is to do the depth analysis. We try to probe below the symptoms to the root cause. We don't attempt to do an analysis of the root cause in the first blush. Here, there is. It can be, on the one hand, the fact that you have 600 employees in Iowa as sort of an issue; it may not be a block. It might not be a block to the vision. It may

be part of the reality - it may not be a factor here, it might be a deterrent but it is not the root cause. It may simply be a symptom of the cause - it may reveal something deeper. You want to have a conversation that really probes back to the root cause.

The third step, usually, in the workshop, which goes back to idealistic thinking, is the arena of "strategic directions." Sometimes we refer to this as "strategic proposals." The reason you are over here in the deductive thinking is that we realize it helps people to be creative. "What are going to be the broad, bold maneuvers, thrusts, directions that have not been done before?" If the Vision is of a five year time frame, the strategic directions may be for one to two years' time frame. "What are the creative resolutions to deal with the contradictions to release the vision?" To put that another way, we like to say that a lot of strategic planning goes from vision as your goals straight into strategies without doing the step of contradictions. What happens too frequently is that you start pushing the goals and we say that it is sometimes more helpful to try to alleviate or relieve the blocks to the goals, than it is to try to force the goals to come into being, to force the vision to come into being. In our case, the strategies remove the factors that are blocking the vision coming into being. What happens is, you see, you don't <u>do</u> a vision; you do strategies and tactics. The vision is sort of your beckon, your radar; it's where you are going. If that is where you want to go, you have to take in the fact, "Well, gee, did anyone remember to put the provisions on the boat?" "Did we do an analysis of the things that are going to stand in our way?" So that is why we do this session. Now I know a lot of people don't - that's fine.

The conversation on contradictions really releases a lot of fresh new creative ideas, because people are dealing with the real issues that they intuit are there to the degree that

you accurately named and titled them so that you have hold of the real issues, then, creativity begins to happen. You discover that energy gets released and it may be that very little of your vision actually gets realized, but what you discover is that because so much energy is being let loose, a lot of things start happening that are toward the positive which is what you are really looking for in the first place. Particularly, of course, if this is done in a participatory fashion rather than just you and me sitting in our office going through this process.

After strategic directions, back to reality. Here are the "measurable accomplishments." You might take for example the one year strategic directions and come up with quarter by quarter what are going to be the accomplishments or the milestones that are concretely going to get us there.

Then the last step is the "implementation timeline" where you might take quarter one and come up with a thirteen week battle plan. This is where the need to integrate strategic planning into operational planning is a concern today. A lot of groups, particularly companies, have what they would refer to as operational plan. The confusion is whether a strategic plan is an operational plan? In our way of coming at it the answer is "no." That is not to say that you have to have an operational plan; that would be more like your business plan. It is not to say that you can't do strategic planning unless you have a business or operational plan. What invariably happens when we work with a lot of non-profit groups or small organizations, you are asking the strategic plan to serve both the role of the regular how they do business day to day anyway with a strategic plan which for us is sort of like those strategic new bursts of energy into the regular operation that releases some of the issues there that have not been dealt with. Usually operational planning does not deal

particularly with the internal issues which are frequently standing in the way from the objectives getting realized. So "corporate" may say your goal is to have a ten percent increase in your earnings every year that may be handed down from above. Our vision may be something quite more encompassing than that. It serves as our collective, what we need to buy into. It means that we still have to do the operational planning.

There are two handouts that you might be making reference to. Let me draw a diagram in another way. [Diagram #2] Here we are in our real situation. We have done a diagnosis of it, we have a handle on what our situation is. That is great. Then we paint for ourselves the vision of where we would like to go down the road. We sort of eyeball it. By the way I have here shared vision. This is where you need to do the workshop method beginning with the individual brainstorming because everyone in the organization has (they might not know they have it) a vision for what they want that organization to be. In the first step of the workshop is asking everyone to outline their own vision for the organization. Then the workshop method using the card technique organizing all the individual visions in common arenas. We cluster them and start titling them. That is very important because that is where you are getting a consensus as to what is our shared vision that honors all the individual input. We don't say that we all agree on every card, but the major categories do in fact reflect what we believe we are striving for as a group. An organizational vision is really the assimilation of the individual visions. In that sense it is shared. We have this in mind together.

As we anticipate moving toward our vision we run into roadblocks along the way. Maybe the tires aren't pumped up; maybe there is a loose bolt in the engine. Maybe we are

going to run out of gas. We do an analysis of blocks in the road that are going to impede our movement. This is the underlying contradictions section.

Then in strategic directions we are thinking of creative maneuvers or bold moves that will begin to alleviate, eradicate, circumvent, undermine, handle, deal with - maybe we can think of an end run like in football - maybe we can think of creative ways to deal with them to come up with strategic directions in that regard.

Then your measurable accomplishments is taking each direction and begin to say this is our one year strategic directions, how do we kind of milestone that out. It kind of works backwards. How do we get from here to there and take each milestone and begin thinking of the tactics to get us to achieve that point.

Question: Do you think it is valuable to take a couple of obvious contradictions and table them so you don't get ...You want everything to be considered? Yes, because if everything is not considered, there are enough people that know that you aren't dealing with the real issues, then they won't be committed to implementing the plan because they know the plan is half baked. *Example, I'm thinking about "We don't have enough time to do that?"* I want to make a distinction between a symptom and a root cause. There is no time, not enough money or people. Those are irritants; they are real; they are issues; but none of them are contradictions. Contradictions can be structures, policies and procedures. It also can be a mindset, mental models, or ways of looking at things. We may be looking at this problem the wrong way because there is as much time in the world for you and me as there is for anyone else. There is tons of money in the world. We may have limited access to it.

Maybe we haven't researched the possible funding options. Maybe we haven't been trained in winning proposal writing methods. But to say there is not enough money, if you end there, you can't have any strategies and then you are victimized. Until you have really got hold of what is at the root of these things you haven't really allowed for creativity to break loose.

One of the ways you really know you have gotten close to a contradiction and adequately captured it in a group discussion, it becomes like a doorway to the future. When people start about "Oh, we could do X and Y and Z to deal with it." Then you know you are close to the contradiction. As soon as they are named, people start beginning to inherently think of creative ways to handle it. Sometimes you have to say, "Hold on you are getting to the next question." and have to bring them back. It is really healing to a group when they know they are dealing with the heart of the matter. And conversely, if they are just going through the motions of putting cards on the wall and having a nice time, you are not dealing with people's spirit. We were talking about organizational spirit this morning. That is at the heart of what you said.

Another diagram [#3] has the planning focus question. In the strategic planning process, if you have not done your situational analysis as a part of coming up with the planning focus, it certainly needs to be incorporated. But again the major five workshops are the practical shared vision, then the underlying contradictions, your strategic proposals or directions. When I say proposals, I don't mean like a fund raising proposal; I mean strategic thrust. Different clients may change the nomenclature, particularly the closer you get to implementation and action planning. Measurable accomplishments, implementation or tactical timelines. We like to tell groups we work with that at least annually you need to

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revisit the vision in a shared group setting. That doesn't mean you need to redo the vision, contradictions, strategic directions over again; at least they need to be reviewed and re-examined. You might come up with a different set of strategic directions and of course, we try to get invited back every ninety days to look at the measurable accomplishments and the quarter timeline if possible.

Another way to look at this is as a slice. These parts are more related to doing an analysis believe it or not. This is why we sometimes can get away with not doing a thorough situational analysis, because we revisit it again in doing underlying contradictions. Having a vision sometimes tells you more about your present situation than your future state of affairs. Because implicit in having a vision is inherently the notion of a latent understanding of our situation. Sometimes a vision clarifies and illuminates more about your present moment than your future. Here the contradictions and strategic directions is more strategic in nature in terms of the planning process. In the measurable accomplishments and the implementation is more action oriented. People want to get off of analysis and move over to actions so doing this whole process does require some collective and individual patience. Particularly in our society that is so prone to want to start solving problems immediately when in fact they have not done a thorough analysis (a) of the situation or (b) where they really want to go. As the old saying goes, "Any way will take you where you don't know where you are going".

We like to start with the vision, because if you don't start there, people get bogged down talking about problems. Many planning sessions say, "let's go with issues, goals, and then strategies." If you start with issues and dwell on them too much, people get bogged

down on them. While you need to do some superficial analysis, really it is the vision that becomes the guiding feature.

We like to say that every good vision is <u>BAD</u>. By that I mean it is <u>B</u>ig, <u>A</u>ttractive and practical in the sense of <u>D</u>oable. An effective vision that motivates a group is comprehensive in nature, attractive in the sense that it is compelling and you get excited about it and just practical enough that you can begin to image yourself as doing it. It is doable in that sense. I don't mean doable in the sense of tactics. This is not pie in the sky here.

Contradictions: everyone knows the problems so you don't need experts to come in from the outside to tell you what the problems are. Problems are really the surface symptoms that reveal the points that are underlying in causing them. That is where you have to get hold of the underlying issues. Naming contradictions is one of the most difficult steps but once it is done one of the most releasing sections. As the saying goes, a problem well-stated is half-solved. The same sort of thing here. A contradiction well-captured, well grabbed hold of, you are already starting to deal with it.

Strategic actions are things that have never been done before by the group. They are bold, creative, innovative. People can get motivated, and yet there is a tangible quality or nature to them.

This afternoon it will be these three workshops around this focus question given our food division simulation.

There is a page on each of the first three workshops: Vision, Contradictions, Strategic Directions. The shared vision is built on the individual visions. One image of that is the piece of a puzzle. Everyone comes to put together a jigsaw puzzle; each of you brings several of the pieces, but we don't have a box lid to see a picture of the final result. We just have to put all our pieces on the table and pull them together to see what sort of picture we are talking about. The image of the contradictions is the dandelion, trying to get hold of the roots. If you just cut it off, the dandelion grows back. So getting hold of the root issue. New directions is creating together different, creative proposals or thrusts that form a common direction. Pulling together new approaches into a common thrust. Those are the images that may be helpful to you.

Now put this in the context of what I mentioned earlier about organizational transformation. Then we can open this up to questions. See if this image is helpful to you. [Diagram #4] An organization is like an organism, particularly a human organism, which has consciousness. It is as if every organization has its collective culture, symbols, mythology, consciousness. What is happening, and has always been happening but we are more conscious of organizational consciousness is the sense of being on or going through a journey. We try to tap into Jung and other contemporary writers and we are still fooling around in this area as well. This is a freebie and not in any textbook you will find anywhere.

One way to talk about the journey of consciousness is "body, mind and spirit" as sort of the levels of unconsciousness that an organism goes through. Taking from Joseph Campbell, there is sort of inward journey and then the journey outward or the journey of return. In the strategic planning mode is a way of simulating the organizational journey in a

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nutshell in a retreat mode. It is as if the whole journey of the organization is repeated or rehearsed in a strategic planning format such as we have described here.

For example doing something like a situational analysis is getting hold of the various components of who we are as an organization. We have 10% growth, we have 350 members, we have 43 employees; this is our situation. The next step is talking about what is our vision. The journey begins launching where a collective mind, new images, new imagination about where the organization could be going, probing "What could we be? What are the intrinsic values that drive us?   What is our mission, our philosophy?"   These questions begin to get exposed in the vision session.

The underlying contradictions really takes a group into the organizational spirit to begin to look at the heart of the matter. To look at that without which if we don't deal with we won't have an organization. Those elements and factors we have to come to terms with. Far beyond the fact that we are in a competitive marketplace or the philanthropic dollars are drying up. What is the problem there? As I stated before, I think that the contradictions workshop is our real gift to strategic planning in that context.

Then we start getting into our strategic proposals or directions. This is where you let loose the creativity. This is not just superficial good idea creativity. This is creativity in terms of staring reality face to face in a depth way. Creativity begins to take place as a return to begin thinking we can do this and that. It is on the other side of having gone through a symplegedes if you please.

Then you are trying in terms of the intellectual level, here are your measurable accomplishments. You start thinking about we could begin to phase this way or that way. You start thinking about how to integrate strategic planning with operational planning.

Then you have the 90 day timeline. Where is your body going to be Tuesday? Who is going to call the alderman on Thursday to implement that tactic as part of this goal which is a part of this strategy alleviating this contradiction to release that vision? There is a synchronicity to the whole thing that weaves it all together in an integrative fashion.

One other thing that should be pointed out in our experience. Even though there might be a seemingly limited focus question which merely gets the ball rolling as you go through the strategic planning process, the whole life of the organization opens up for the group. Because in the strategic planning process, as we've just walked through, the relationship of one single issue to the entire organization gets revealed. Our process reveals the integrative nature that an organization is and discloses how if in order to deal with one issue, the whole organization will need to be examined and addressed. So, don't worry if your client wants to focus; trust the method to reveal for them the whole.

REFLECTIVE PAPER ON MY PRESENTATION ON STRATEGIC PLANNING

AS PART OF A TRAINING PROGRAM

James P. Troxel

1992

<u>Setting</u>

Twice a year the staff of the Institute of Cultural Affairs in Chicago recruit and conduct training programs in organizational development. One of these two-day programs has to do with learning how to facilitate strategic planning workshops. During November of 1991, I was on the staff of such a program and delivered a presentation on the philosophy and methods of strategic planning.

Seven participants attended the training seminar conducted at our International Conference Center in Uptown. Accompanying this Reflective Paper is an audio-tape of my presentation, a transcript of the presentation, the images I drew on the board during my presentation, the participant's manual and design of the whole training program, and a "simulation case study" I prepared specifically for this training event.

Our approach to training people in new skills and methods is three fold. First, we demonstrate the new skill. Second, we explain the new skill making reference to the demonstration. Thirdly, we have the participants practice the new skills in simulated circumstances with optimum trainer feedback. We conclude such programs with group reflective discussions on their experiences and learnings. My presentation was fulfilling the

second part of the program.

After my presentation I opened the discussion up for questions and answers. Part of this Reflective Paper encompasses some of the points brought out during this time. It would be appropriate before one proceeds to either listen to the audio-tape or read the transcript of the talk in order to best understand and appreciate this reflection. The audio-tape is better from the standpoint of being able to better capture the interaction between myself and the trainees.

What is Strategic Planning?

In our corporate lexicon, we have referred to our strategic planning approach as "LENS" (Leadership Effectiveness and New Strategies), "Indicative Battle-Planning", and other ICA-jargon. For the purposes of this presentation I will use the commonly accepted trade term of "strategic planning."

One of the things I find quite common is the confusion over the difference between "strategic planning" and "operational planning." In fact, many of our clients, especially non-profit and public sector groups, want to have the strategic plan encompass ongoing operational planning. An operational plan, like a business plan, describes the regular functioning of the organization. A strategic plan designs selective bursts of new energy to inject into the organization's operation.

Below is a chart that might begin to depict the distinction between a business plan and a strategic plan:

	Business Plan	Strategic Plan
Perspective	Inside-Out	Outside-In
Theme	Doing Things Right	Doing the Right Things
Value	Efficiency	Effectiveness
Image	Snap Shot	Moving Picture
Standing Point	Mission Statement	Vision
Time Frame	Short Range	Long Range
Process	Mission Statement Needs Assessment Operational Goals	Practical Vision Underlying Barriers Strategic Directions
Tools	Organizational Analysis: Strengths/Weaknesses/ Opportunities/Threats	Environmental Scanning: Larger Socio-Economic Trends
Helpful in Relation to:	Financial Planning	Market Planning
Pitfalls	Too Bureaucratic	Implementation Interface with Operational Plan

For us, strategic planning is different from operational or business planning in that it intends to focus a group's action at what might be called the key "leverage points" or those aspects and components of the organization where if concerted energy were placed would bring about the most effective response. Strategies then become the infusion of new energy focused at those parts of an organization that could bring about the biggest difference.

In this light, what strategic planning beckons is "strategic thinking." Strategic thinking might be characterized by a high degree of holistic thinking and viewing of the system in question.

Strategies do not encompass all the activities the organization is performing. Those would be included more in the operational plan. Strategies tend to be indirect in nature. Therefore, in that sense there is not an obvious direct "cause and effect" relationship between the source of the action and the end result. An issue such as "Inadequate Market Analysis" might not be simply remedied by "Perform Market Analysis" - which would be linear thinking - but might be "Include a three question customer survey at the bottom of every invoice."

Frequently we discover that we have to cover some of the basic components of an operational plan before we can really proceed effectively with strategic planning. Most notable is the mission statement. If an organization does not have an idea as to its purpose and reason for being and who its major constituents are, then trying to envision its future is difficult. This is particularly true with non-profit groups and to a certain extent, public and

private agencies as well. Another key ingredient for successful strategic planning is an adequate analysis of "current reality." If a group does not know "where they are now," projecting together ahead "where they want to be" a common standing point will be frustrating because of the differing perspectives from which the visioning process began.

We believe ardently in the value of planning being done in a collective or participative fashion. In fact, one of our convictions is that for a strategic plan to be implemented successfully, all the people who will be engaged in its implementation need to be a part of its creation. This creates a high degree of buy-in and commitment to the plan required for its success. Operational planning requires, generally, less participation in its formation. All too frequently, however, it is done in an ivory tower setting removed from the actual realities of the day to day operation.

The Philosophy of the Planning Dynamics

In my presentation I make reference to the dialogue between inductive and deductive logic as the framework for proceeding along the strategic planning path. One could say that our approach fosters "transrational" thinking in the sense that it tries to balance, in the form of a harmony, the two major approaches to logic and reasoning formulated by Western Civilization. Championed originally by Plato and Aristotle respectively, "idealism" (originally referred to as "realism" interestingly enough) and "realism" (or "nominalism") form the counter-points of a history long view on how the human mind functions.

I first encountered a serious examination of the dialogue between idealism and realism several years ago when I was studying church history. Paul Tillich (<u>A History of Christian Thought</u>, New York: Harper and Row, 1968) in a discussion on the Franciscans (Platonic in their thinking) and the Dominicans (Aristotelian in their thinking). He traced this dialogue down throughout church history and showed how it shows up even today. In the next four paragraphs I paraphrase some of this discussion.

In the Platonic philosophy, idealism holds that the ideas or essences of things have reality and power of being. The universals, the essences, the nature of things, the nature of truth, the nature of man, etc. are powers which determine what every individual thing, such as a tree or every individual person, will always become when it develops. This has been called by some "mystical realism" in which the universals are realties.

Realism of Aristotelian thinking holds the opposite view. Only particulars exist, only this tree exists or this person exists, not the power of treehood which makes it possible to become a tree, or personhood. Facts are real; ideas are not.

Here you have an example of the difference in feeling. If, as a realist, you look at a tree, you feel: "This is a real thing; if I run against it, I will hurt myself." But it is also possible in looking at it to be astonished that with all the seeds sown in the soil, this particular structure of a tree develops, shooting up and spreading its branches. Then in this big tree you can see "treehood", and not just a big tree. And in Sussie and Billy you can see not only these particular individuals, but also the nature of humanity, as a power which makes it possible for all people to have this character.

When one reads about idealism and realism (or realism and nominalism) in the text books of logic, one should not be betrayed into the belief that this is in itself a basically logical or philosophical problem. It may need to be discussed in those terms; but it really has to do with the attitude toward reality as a whole which expresses itself also in the logical realm.

The key to transrational thinking is to be able to access both types of thinking and to blend them together in the form of a unity. Both views are correct and yet both are incorrect. This is one of the paradoxes of life to be embraced. Perhaps the idea of the unity of synthesis such as the Oriental symbol of the Yin-Yang best captures the truth of the way to view the world. Transrational thinking is the capacity to embrace both views of life and construct models and make plans.

Similar to this is the notion of inductive and deductive thinking. Reasoning from experience to theory (i.e., from concrete/particular to abstract/universal) is called inductive. Deductive reasoning moves from theory to experience (i.e., from abstract/ universal to concrete/particular). Inductive reasoning looks upon the world as it is and formulates in the mind an understanding of it. Deductive thinking looks into the realm of the intuitive and the essence of things in order to derive life's meanings. Both processes go on in all of us. Both are available to be tapped into. While contradictory in their approaches, each have a validity of their own. Again, the idea of the unity in a synthesis best captures the modality of thinking required to live effectively. It is best to think of the interplay between the inductive and the deductive as a continuous, somewhat circular process. Theory, context and perspective suggests new ways to view the empirical; and action in turn begs a theory, context or

framework to help rationalize it.

Strategic planning - as a form of transrational thinking - attempts to hold this balance. Looking at current reality is "realism" by inducing from reality an interpretation of what is happening. Envisioning a desired future is "idealism" because we deduce from some inherent perspective a desired state of affairs. Then, returning to reality, we examine the barriers to the vision; and from there we design the bold creative new directions to alleviate the barriers which is ideal thinking again.

Robert Fritz, famous for the DMA approach to individual empowerment, has a similar perspective when he says that one needs to hold a creative tension between "current reality" and "vision." He says, "In structural tension a force is mobilized which helps propel you toward chosen results. This force is generated from the natural movement of tension toward resolution. As structural tension moves toward structural resolution, energy is released. As you master the principle of structural tension, you are able to generate and release energy which becomes available for direct use in bringing forth what you choose to create." This passage comes from his book, The Path of Least Resistance (Salem, MA: DMA, Inc., 1984), the title of which seems contradictory on the surface, but in a deeper sense, the release of creative new energy is what strategic thinking is all about and in the long run enables a person or an organization to be more empowered and effective.

We originally came upon this style of thinking for our work in group process planning from John Paul Sartre, the French Existentialist philosopher. In his article entitled "The Philosophy of Revolution" he states the following:

"Thus the revolutionary act demands that we transcend, in the unity of a synthesis, the opposition of materialism - which can account for a society's disintegration, but not the construction of a new society - and idealism, which confers a legal existence upon facts. It calls for a new philosophy, with a different view of man's relations with the world. To make the revolution possible, man must be rooted in the contingency of the facts, and yet be detached from them. He obtains that by the power he has to prepare for the future and, consequently, transcend the present, disengaging himself from his situation.

"This disengagement is in no way comparable to the negative movement through which the Stoic tries to take refuge in himself; it is by projecting himself ahead, in committing himself in ventures of one kind or another, that the revolutionary transcends the present; and since he is a man, doing a man's work, this power of disengagement must really be attributed to all human activity. The slightest human gesture can be understood in terms of the future; even the reactionary faces the future, since he is concerned with preparing a future that will be identical with the past.

"The tactician's absolute realism demands that man be plunged into reality, menaced with concrete dangers, victim of a concrete oppression from which he will deliver himself through equally concrete acts. Blood, sweat, sorrow and death are not ideas; the rock that crushes and the bullet that kills are not ideas. But, in order that objects may reveal what Bachelard rightly calls their 'element of adversity', the

light of a plan or illuminating scheme, be it only the very simple and crude one of living, is necessary.

"If man plans, as Marx states, to 'change the world', it means that he is, to begin with, a being for whom the world exists in its totality. And never -like a piece of phosphorus or lead - only a part of the universe and ridden by forces which he does not understand and to which he submits. This means that man transcends the world toward a future state from which he can contemplate it. It is in changing the world that we can come to know it. Neither the detached consciousness that would soar over the universe without being above to get a standpoint on it, nor the material object which reflects a condition without understanding it, can ever "grasp" the totality of existence in a synthesis, even a purely conceptual one.

"Only a man situated in the universe and completely crushed by the forces of Nature and transcending them completely through his design to master them can do this. It is the elucidation of the new ideas of "situation" and of "being-in-the-world" that revolutionary behavior specifically calls for."

Ken Wilbur (Eye to Eye: The Quest for the New Paradigm, New York: Anchor Books, 1983) refers also to this "third way" of knowing. Calling realism the "Eye of the Flesh" and idealism the "Eye of Reason", Wilbur uses the metaphor of the "Eye of Contemplation" pointing to the capacity to see transparently between the two. He talks about the "salutary truth" beyond the truth of sense objects and philosophy. He points to the capacity to have revelatory insights beyond mere empirical cognition and logical relationships.

In my view the capacity to develop this third perspective comes about when one intensifies the other two in tension with each another. This keeps this third perspective from being merely etherial and more rooted in the struggle to maintain the dialogue between the "body" and the "mind." Similar to the "ahas" of paradigm shifts which occur in the tension between the facts of the situation and the old view or perspective from which those facts were interpreted. New facts learned through empirical inquiry don't always neatly fit into a old paradigm that interprets the world. Suddenly, in the form of an "aha", a new paradigm gets birthed that encompasses the old but also is able to interpret the new observations of fact.

As Thomas Kuhn himself says (The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Chapter: "Revolutions as Changes of World View"; Phoenix Books, The University of Chicago Press, 1962):

> *"None of these remarks is intended to indicate that scientists do not characteristically interpret observations and data....But each of these interpretations presupposed a paradigm. They were parts of normal science, an enterprise that aims to refine, extend, and articulate a paradigm that is already in existence....The scientist, by virtue of an accepted paradigm, knew what a datum was, what instruments might be used to retrieve it, and what concepts were relevant to its interpretation. Given a paradigm, interpretation of data is central to the enterprise that explores it.*

> *"But that interpretive enterprise can only articulate a paradigm, not correct it.*

Paradigms are not corrigible by normal science at all. Instead, normal science ultimately leads only to the recognition of anomalies and to crises. And these are terminated, not by deliberation and interpretation, but by a relatively sudden and unstructured event like the gestalt switch. Scientists then often speak of the 'scales falling from the eyes' or of the 'lightening flash' that 'inundates' a previously obscure puzzle, enabling its components to be seen in a new way that for the first time permits its solution. On other occasions the relevant illumination comes in sleep. No ordinary sense of the term 'interpretation' fits these flashes of intuition through which a new paradigm is born. Though such intuitions depend upon the experience, both anomalous and congruent, gained with the old paradigm, they are not logically or piecemeal linked to particular items of that experience as an interpretation would be. Instead, they gather up large portions of that experience and transform them to the rather different bundle of experience that will thereafter be linked piecemeal to the new paradigm but not to the old."

Strategic planning - as strategic thinking - is the development of new ways for the members of an organization to see their reality with new eyes. It is the formation of a paradigm or perspective out of which the organization interprets what is going on around it and within itself. If during the course of a strategic planning retreat, the participants begin to see the same things in new ways which releases their creativity to respond, the facilitators have done their job.

All this serves as the back-drop for the presentation I made upon strategic planning.

Someday, I would like to more fully develop this theme because I think it is so important in the development of mental capacities. For example, I think in this discussion lies the elements of the entire thinking process, the role "image" plays in learning and the theoretical components of "model building" as a distinct skill.

Contradiction Analysis

The employment of contradiction analysis into strategic planning is the ICA's unique gift to this field. The term itself, however, throws many of our clients, as well as some of our own staff. We first encountered the word in our study of Mao Tse-Tung wherein it is used as a symbol, once again, for the combination of opposites in a unity. Mao's gift as a thinker was his capacity to combine the dialectical thinking underpinning socialist thought with the Oriental view of complimentary dualism. "Contradiction" refers to the struggle of opposites wherein, however, each force was dependent upon the other for its existence. Therefore, a reality greater than either of the two opposing forces must be evident that created the impasse. If that impasse that was blocking the realization of the future could be identified, then creative energy could be released to leverage it.

In this sense, contradictions are the leverage points or as other management thinkers have expressed, the "critical issues" (eg, Top Management Strategy, Benjamin B. Tregoe and John W. Zimmerman; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980).

Contradictions cannot be discerned without a Vision to serve as a reference point. One can see problems and issues, but one does not really have the perspective to peer

beneath those issues to the underlying causes except with a vision to provide a standing point to see what's really going on. In this sense, the term contradiction does not refer to the obvious problems but to a vortex of underlying irritants, deterrents and blocks, the coagulation of which transparently reveals the focal point of organizational paralysis in relation to the practical vision.

Contradictions are the name given to the root causes to the blocks and impediments to the Vision. They are discovered by first asking everyone to express the frustrations, irritants, issues, blocks, etc. standing in the way of the Vision's fulfillment. These are exhaustively brainstormed and then "gestalted" into patterns that suggest differing strands sharing common root causes. The break-through happens when the group is able to name or title an underlying "contradiction." Frequently, this is the most healing session of the full strategic planning workshop because when a handle is given to people to the very thing that is blocking their own energy, they feel released from something heretofore they did not have a name for and therefore empowered to do something about.

Contradictions are the places (structures, policies, practices, procedures, attitudes, conditions, etc.) within an organization where the energy toward the future is intercepted by the negative forces blocking that energy's release. The identification of these contradictions become the leverage points where if a concentrated burst of creative energy is focused it will release - like a busted damn - more energy. It's like those certain "whistle points" that can cause a mighty avalanche.

Usually people want to say that the critical issues they face are the absence of

something. For example, it is not uncommon to hear expressed in a non-profit group that their problem is "lack of funds." While I'm sure this is true, it's not a contradiction. In this session, the facilitator keeps asking "Why?" "Why don't you have funds?" It's like the distinction between the "felt need" and the "real need." Frequently we discover with something like "lack of funds," the real issue is more like "Untapped In-House Resources" or "Undeveloped Grant Writing Techniques" or "Unresearched Funding Prospects." These are all things that are real and that can be dealt with.

Usually there is one contradiction among many that seems to emerge as the "Master Contradiction." It's not necessarily the one that has the most originally brainstormed items attached to it, but frequently that's the case. Furthermore, more often than not, this "Master Contradiction" has something to do with a sort of "Victim Image" the group has about itself. A sense of powerlessness or a feeling that things are out of their control. If a group really believes that they are totally subject to forces outside themselves, then they can't really plan their future. A related theme is the discovery of dependency relationships that exist between the organization and perhaps some external funding agency or governing body. The members of the group feel as if they can't do anything.

Until such underlying beliefs are exposed, described and discussed, a group can't freely move to develop strategies. These discoveries have to be legitimate "self-discoveries." Outside consultants preaching at them won't too often change people into believing. Self-realization is the best base for self-confidence and authentic motivation. That is what a trained facilitator tries to enable during the Contradictions workshop of the strategic planning process.

Once contradictions are adequately captured and titled, they frequently reveal timely social truths about the organization. In this sense they have a revelatory aspect to them: they reveal the true state of affairs, the "really real" conditions of the organizations. While seemingly coming as negations to the Vision, they are in fact doorways to the future. They reveal where creativity is needed. A contradiction then is a positive leverage point by which trends are unblocked to move into the future.

I don't feel like I can say enough about the importance of contradiction analysis as part of the strategic planning process. Much has already been said of Vision - and indeed I could say more there myself - but I wanted to express here what I think is the key depth insight the ICA has to share in the arena of strategic planning.

Concluding Reflections

In retrospect, I have two opposite feelings about the presentation I made to the trainees. One is I could have said a lot more and the other is that I might have tried to cover too much. The second observation is a more keen concern given the fact that most people learn by doing and then reflecting on their doing. Perhaps, I should have given the participants more of just the methods without too much on the theory of the process; and then after they had practiced the methods themselves some I could have shared more of the depth of the approach. Doing it at that time might give them an even greater appreciation for the profundity of our approach then when I did.

Some of the learnings I picked up in my other learning projects found their way into my presentation. One of the things I have appreciated about working on several learning projects simultaneously is their effect upon each other. While doing them in a linear fashion - i.e., one after the other - might be better for sanity's sake, this way it's more fun and spontaneous. I enjoy it a lot more, but admittedly sometimes I sort of lose my place and forget where one idea came from.

I have not mentioned yet the simulation case study I prepared as part of this exercise. In order to train participants in the strategic planning approach we have them practice it themselves using a simulated organization. In the past we had used very simple settings such as a community town meeting or a non-profit organization. This time, however, in order to stretch our own capacities and to be better able to reflect the background of the participants, I wrote up a simulation of a corporation. Using a recent client I had served, I altered the names (to protect the innocent). We invited each participant to play the various roles that I had recently been exposed to myself. This was the first time I had done something like this and the feedback was quite rewarding. It was interesting to note that the participants were not of course steeped in the full background of the situation; yet that enabled them to rely more upon their instincts and intuitions as to the real situation the company was facing and less upon the empirical data. In many ways, their analysis of the contradictions, for example, was closer to the truth than those of the client itself. Anyway, I wanted to highlight this aspect since it too was an added dimension to the program that we normally provide.

I appreciated the opportunity to be required to write this Reflective Paper. It provided me with an occasion to express some additional insights and state some important points that I feel need to be shared. I hope others in addition to my Professional Advisor will have benefitted not only from the transcript itself, but also from this Reflective Paper. I will be sharing this one with some of my colleagues here in the states and around the world in hopes of integrating their insights and feedback along with the transcript into a single chapter of my Master's Work.