

ICA: The Hero with a Thousand Faces

Tojo Thankarey's report on The Appreciative Inquiry Process
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ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATIONS:

When I came in as a researcher here, I observed some snapshots of what is going on. I looked for the most obvious. There is nothing I have to say in this report which you don't already know, so don't expect any surprises or novelty. Yet, it is like observing a fish in the water from outside. So, I'm going to say what I noticed as a result of me being an outsider. The first thing I noticed right from the time I came in is that people like each other. This seems like an obvious statement, but I have not seen that in most other places. The second thing is that people here, essentially, are as smart as whips. I can feel that. Yesterday one of the board members told me that ICA people look comprehensively at the world and they have a large mind. Third, all I.C.A. is a marvel of human creation. That came to my mind as a result of observing all that was going on here. There are all kinds of paradoxes in a dynamic tension. And I found a kind of a beauty in this creation called I.C.A.

This building is a microcosm of I.C.A. culture and values. There is a kind of eagerness to demonstrate who we are. I have to ask if you are singing while you are dish washing, saying what a wonderful day. I don't know who was singing that but I heard it and that made me think that it is a good thing to do. Then I noticed the sense of humor in the sessions. This is remarkable. You may not think it is something great, but I say that it is. There is also a sense of humor in relating to people here in this building. I noticed high energy, a lot of collegiality, a mutual respect of people. I must say that ICA:Belgium, ICAI and Service Ventures, who made all these arrangements, have a sense of warmth; they are very sensitive and patient. They took care to find out if things are taken care of. The fact that they tolerated me is more than anything else because I am very rarely tolerated outside. For example I went to all possible rooms, except the bathrooms to do the interviews.

Then comes the last snapshot I noticed as a researcher. This is an organization of globally spaced people dealing with innocent suffering. People come from all around the world and yet have a common mission of dealing with innocent suffering. Another insight I heard was that if you focus on the human factor, you will find the answers faster. I found this a profound statement because that summarizes what ICA has been doing all the time. Then there was a sense of concern. Someone said that it looks like people are dispersing. Others said they want a more community feeling. That again cued me again to where this community sense is coming from. Finally I was wondering why people in ICA do all this? One person made a powerful statement, "Because we want to leave footprints on the sands of time."

ICA: THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES:

BASIC VALUES:

The title of this report is ICA: The Hero with a Thousand Faces as a take off from Joseph Campbell's book. I really feel that ICA is a hero with multiple expressions and manifestations. The hero has one body and one mind which consists of many values. I have done more than 30 interviews, and going through the tapes I did a thematic analysis, looking for common themes, organizing them and trying to substantiate them with quotations. I had 3 questions: What are the basic values? What are the peak experiences? What do you want to see happen?

These are the values which surfaced as a result of the thematic analysis.

1. Affirmation. The most important basic value was affirmation; the whole ICA is based on a sense of affirmation.
2. Corporateness: There is a powerful sense of corporateness, that people want to be together, having a sense of community.
3. Consensus process: everyone has a voice, therefore everyone should be heard; therefore we should be consensual in nature.
4. Spirit: ICA is a church or a temple for me. Someone said "I am ICA". That kind of powerful commitment is very rare to see anywhere else. That comes from the spirit core value.
5. Mission: There is a service mission about ICA and all the people
6. "Life itself is good and gives people possibilities". Several people give this impression.
7. Say yes to life. Almost everyone said that.
8. Challenge: "I want to be pushed to work beyond the edges of my skills." "I have been able to demonstrate that anybody can do it."
9. Openness and sensitivity.
10. Sacrificial living. To some extent that is changing but too some extent is a very powerful value.
11. Life is a gift. "We all have gifts." I must say that ICA is a special organization in speaking this language, believing this language and acting this language.
12. Strong interpersonal relationships. "When I left Japan, I cried all the way to the airport." "When I left 5th City, I cried." When I meet my people, I feel close, something like coming to a family coming here.
13. Grounded spirit depth. There is a deep, intense quality about spirit that is grounded in action; it is not mere theory or talking.
14. Actions as accomplishments. Your actions demonstrate the accomplishment. The actions are a manifestation of the challenge and your basic values.
15. Commitment to the mystery of life. Life is a mystery. I want to discover that, a power beyond myself. God was the limit. My commitment to God and its mystery.
16. Individual and organizational value compatibility. Traditionally as you look at organizations there is always a mismatch of the individual activities and goals and the organizations goals. That is the way organizations are organized.

So ICA is one of the rare cases where there is a match between individual and organizational values.

17. Risk taking. Willingness to put your life on the line.

18. Service mentality.

19. Trusting others. Trust what is going on here. We believe that something will come out of what is going that will be good for everyone. So I trust other people.

20. Fulfillment and enrichment. You are seeking a life through ICA. ICA helps me realize who I am. ICA provides me a vehicle. My association with ICA saved my life. It saved my life to have meaning. My professional life wasn't enough.

21. Facilitating the global dialogue. A sense of globality.

22. Diversity/unity interchange.

23. Affirmative action orientation. Actions have to be an affirmation of other people. More than saying yes, but acting. Action is an affirmation of saying yes. Therefore it is an action oriented group.

24. Collegiality. Capacity for teamwork. Care for the neighbor.

25. Making a difference. I want to make a difference. I want to leave footprints on the sands of time. I want to CREATE a difference.

26. Excellence.

27. Fulfillment through others. Self as others, that you discovered yourself through other people.

28. Intercultural sensitivity. Everyone has something to offer. The value of participation by everyone.

29. Egalitarian values. Mutuality, participation, belief in collaboration.

30. Empowering people.

31. Accelerated learning. It seems that when you look at the organizational learning processes in ICA it is very exhilarating compared to the kind of processes that I have observed elsewhere. It seems that there is something about the total involvement of the people in that. When one of you went to see a development officer in a country, he asked, "How old are you?" He responded, "Twenty-four." The official said, "Come back after 24 years." That was some kind of a shock. The person said I was able to go a year later, it didn't take me 24 years. That indicates the speed at which you learn.

32. Altering people's consciousness.

33. Living on behalf of other people.

34. Finding a way of sustaining oneself.

35. Doing something to make this world a more human place to live.

36. The great truths of life are paradoxes. The ability of ICA to be in a state of ambiguity is coming out. You recognize the basic dialectic nature of existence. I was looking at JT fax which he sent talking about the tension between the two polarities.

THE POWER OF AFFIRMATION:

This leads me to say two things. ICA basic values are so powerful that they are not negotiable. I worked in Chicago where we did 100 interviews and transcribed them. I was struck by the similarities between the values stated in Chicago and those values I see here. I expected there would be more differences because the locations are very different; therefore one ICA would be different than any other. I came with that presumption. But the interview data suggests that there is only one ICA. It is important for me to say that because what I hear here is the need to have autonomy and individuality, but the ultimate reality is that there is just one ICA. There is no way you can negotiate those values. Whenever you try to do it, people don't let you.

This non-negotiable nature of the basic values helped me come up with this analysis of affirmation in ICA. I noticed how much time you spend in procedures talking about things because everything has to be done by consensus. You spent five days to do several things. You could also have done that in one day or five weeks. But why did you choose to do it the way you did it. Then I put that in the context of the questions about "Do we need an ICAI?" What is the significance of ICAI? Can we do without it? If we have it, what do we need to have happen? There is a lot about the very basic existence of ICAI is an affirmation, yet there is a concern. Why is it like that? I found an answer.

Scenario 1. This is what ICA was in the beginning. At the beginning the central notion of ICA as service to others (each person's self is discovered through other people and therefore you go out and do things for other people) is different than what the Yogis do by meditation, where discover self as himself. ICA discovers self as others. At the beginning it was largely internal. All kinds of structures and practices created dynamics for mutual affirmation in the ICA. "When I went to the Marshall Islands I knew that what you can get will be more than what you can give." This is a classic example of how I interpret the reality of ICA. It is not based on what is happening outside, but the source of affirmation comes from the ICA community.

Scenario 2. Sources of organization are largely interorganizational, intrasocietal and external. So it has moved to the outside. Now you have self as others notion still, that hasn't changed because the basic value of ICA is non-negotiable. Then comes affirmation by others. If you look at this as the boundary of ICA, the affirmation basis shifted outside because you started working in local communities. A lot of organizational practices sustained the internal affirmation ceased to exist, the spirit practices and rituals did not happen after scenario one. Therefore since the affirmation was there, the focus moved outward. Mostly other community groups and partly ICA community. This was a shift I noticed in the affirmation value.

What does this do? The result? This produced a cognitive dissonance, a strain on the basic values of corporateness. What

struck was most on the value of corporateness and consensus. So the basic assumption again is that the values are non-negotiable so when you have cognitive dissonance, remembering the affirmation moving outside, the corporateness is reduced. Yet you cannot do without corporateness. Therefore there will be emergent processes which will produce the organism, the ICA, to reduce cognitive dissonance and maintaining homeostasis. Therefore what will happen is that in the absence of conscious acknowledgment of the dissonance, tacit fulfillment of the basic values will take place through affirming corporateness by consensus building in all procedures. To simplify this since corporateness is a basic value and you need it, yet the affirmations have moved outward by and large and there is an absence of conscious acknowledgement that we need to come here because we are family. Everyone comes here because you feel like family, but you don't say that is why you have come here. All these procedures that you have here, there is so much time spent on consensus that would ultimately discovering or reaffirming the existence of corporateness. That is where you always spend so much time because that is a basic value and it is non-negotiable. So what happened was not so much the importance of consensus building to achieve on the outcomes you have today. You could achieve these outcomes by not consensus building also. But the fact that through that process your basic values are affirmed and that is tacit because you could not have spent that time on corporateness itself. Consensus building as a life-giving force. So the final outcome is a reaffirmation of the values of corporateness and consensus-building by tacit procedures and activities. One person said submission to the judgment of my colleagues. When I come here I submit myself to the judgment of my colleagues which is corporateness, consensus building and reaffirmation of the basic values. The result is the homeostasis is brought back as self as others so the community can be maintained. That is why I found the whole intricate dynamics of what is going on to some extent explained by this. The retrospective sense making on that is that activities and procedures of the last five days were mechanism of affirming and replenishing the basic values of ICA. So that is the statement that I will make. You can believe it or not.

If you have a large family with grandchildren and you join after a long time, you are really excited about meeting after a long time. But you won't spend a lot of time thinking about what you should be doing but just being that community. If you can't do that you will find ways of doing that. Ultimately this is an affirmation of corporateness.

PEAK EXPERIENCES:

Most peak experiences were events, programs and projects of ICA. Interestingly almost all were programs which you have had in the past and not so much now: RSI, Academy, IERD, Mexico Conference, building a house in Indonesia worth \$50,000 with \$5,000 in hand, Town Meetings, summer programs in Chicago, imaginal education, celebrations of ICA, altering time experience, helping ICA to get UN recognition, Global Odyssey, teaching, celebration with an aboriginal community (getting back to their culture), working with villagers as partners, Under the Pipal Tree in Brussels, being asked to teach in English on an island when I was not an English teacher, teaching in India, my individual growth and an opportunity to stand on my own, commitment, learning how to build green houses, getting expertise in my field, when I left a village in Malaysia the imam prayed for me, helping people come to grips with their own needs, quitting my company to go for a consult, funeral of my daughter, living out of the word and the deed (giving up our lives), my time in Nigeria, Middle East, USA, India, Kenya, Marshall Islands, Philippines, Chile (in short my time in the world) which is a phenomenal quality of ICA, working with village people, national staff, local community, the school system (in short working with people).

Another thing I noticed in the peak experiences was that people join ICA out of the blue. For example "I went for the university internship program and decided to stay." "I went to RSI and decided to stay." So you go for a weekend and decide to stay. "I went to the Academy and decided to stay."

Creating social inventions was a peak experience, like the Town Meetings and the 5th City experiment are social inventions. Someone said starting ICA:West in the US was a peak experience. So creation as a peak experience is something very unique about ICA.

THE DIALECTIC OF ICA:

These two statements which made me reflect: "The great truths of life are paradoxical" and "We want creative responses to societal contradictions". These led me straight to the dialectic that is happening in ICA, a dynamic tension between the two. This is my opinion so there is no need for consensus on this.

1. Strong networking moving toward indigenization. By this I mean, people are traveling all around. One village you have people from five countries doing a project. Now it is moving toward each location taking care of its own needs.
2. Intra-organizational to interorganizational affirmation. That is one reason why you have the questions about networking.
3. Unity in diversity in the past to diversity in the unity in the present. In the sense there was more unity in the beginning with one unit which permitted diversity but the unity was overarching.

Now it has moved to diversity in unity. You want to have diversity yet you want to be one. That is why you want ICAI yet you want to be different in your own ways. You want to be one under the umbrella of ICAI.

4. Under assignment to individual responsibility and free choice. People were under assignment so you did not have to make the decision about where to go or what to do. That was easier to do because someone asked you and you respected that. So when you are under assignment there is a more missional quality to what you are doing because it comes from above. But now it has become individual responsibility and free choice. You say what you want to do to a large extent. You have a lot of choice on that. That produces problems if you don't really know how to do this and you don't really want this essentially. It produces all kinds of multiple interpretations of what is possible. This can be very messy because depending on how many people there are in one place, there will be that many options and that many choices.

5. ICA as a creator and meaning maker of life in the past. For example many have met their spouses in the ICA. There was no distinction between work and the rest of their lives; the infusion was so deep that the personal life, family life and organizational life wasn't different. Now ICA has become a vehicle of basic value expression. You are using the ICA to express those basic values, which are very much a part of you. The ICA scene has changed and what ICA means to you has changed.

COMPLEMENTARITY OF THEORY AND ACTION:

This is about the complementarity of theory and action. As you look at scenario 1 and 2, this is what it was and what it is to some extent now. Now there is practically no theory. You know what you are doing, but you are not spending enough time to have a theoretical base for it. In the past you had more of a theoretical base so you could find the meaning in what you were doing a lot, and thereby there was a lot of commitment. But now when you make this important transition, you need some kind of a theory, some kind of a forum or a course to support what you are doing here.

I called this the circle of imperative and indicatives. This is an important difference I have noticed here from what you are saying. What has happened is that you have always assumed that the imperative arises from the indicative. The imperative comes out of the indicative. I think that is a basic ICA value. But what is actually happening is a circle. For example if you look at Monday, first you discussed the functions. Then you went back to see what are the values. The values came after the reports. You have a function, then you find out what is the value of the function. In my opinion it is a circular force which means that you cannot really start by what is because historically you have been a creator, you have been inventing things and that is where I see a mismatch because ICA is a social inventor. You create what you want to create. You are not just a big organization which will deal with what is outside. You have been doing that but

historically there is an ability to create experiences not just respond to what is out there. Therefore I think it becomes circular.

You have moved "from training village leaders to training organizations in transformation." This was another key observation I found. Not everyone said or agrees with this, yet I tried to see why some people would think like that. If you look historically Human Development Projects were very exciting. They had a challenge to them; there was a novelty of experiencing and witnessing change. There was a continuous interpretation of the work as having the most significant meaning and worth in one's life and the excitement of making a difference.

What happened then? I believe to some extent when you do this hundreds of times the basic human tendency is to tire and get bored by it. You have done Town Meetings and HDPs hundreds of times. You are finding there are other things which are more meaningful to do. Making a difference has moved elsewhere, therefore the proposition is that basic values of ICA which continue to be the same call for more challenging and novel opportunities for its expression and manifestation. I see this as a trend.

THE IMPACT ICA HAD ON MY LIFE:

Another theme was the impact ICA had on peoples lives. This was a very common statement: "It gave me an active way of playing a role." "It gave a meaning in my life." ICA has left an impact on people's mind which is hard to remove. What made me make this a separate category is that when people have left ICA, even if they left in bitterness, they still have good things to say about it. As someone said, people who left are still leading a caring life. They haven't changed. ICA has shaped the destiny of many people including those who left. ICA is a very powerful force on people.

COMMON THREADS IN ALL ICAS:

I asked two questions in addition to the three questions about peak experiences, values and what you want to see happen. Because it is an ICAI conference, I asked, "What are the common threads in ICA? What is holding together all ICAs?" Then I asked the question, "What is different about this ICA?" Inevitably by the time the people answered what was in common about all ICAs, they forgot the second question. So many things are talked about that is common to all ICAs. This made me wonder why there are these tacit differences that each ICA is so different. Yet when you ask the question what are the similarities you come out with the same answer I got for the question about basic values of ICA.

Human development aspects, common mission, development orientation, methods, emphasis on human factor, community living, corporateness, consensus building, common perception that collaboration is a mode for the future, the notion that my life can make a difference, valuing diversity, global networking, trusting others, everyone has an intuitive sense of what is happening in this world and their role in that. If you had to summarize all this, what came to my

mind is, "All ICAs are doing good work." No one said, "This ICA is not doing that", or "I am doing better than another ICA", which is what you normally hear in other places. If you go to an association meeting, in addition to the fist fighting, you also hear how one is doing better than another. That is why when someone mentioned being an association, what came to my mind is that there are all kinds of coalitions and that is not what the data is saying. The data is saying that there is only one ICA. It is negating that there is even an international organization; it is all one community. As you can see this is the same response as the basic values of ICA. This is exactly what I found in looking at the ICA in the United States in Chicago, the values were similar.

THE EVOLUTION AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SECULARISM:

What happened to secularism in ICA? Scenario 1: ICA as a spiritual body of people organized around Christian values expressing themselves in profound humanistic forms. So you organized around Christian values but the expressions were humanistic. For example Fifth City experiment, HDPs and so on. Now if you look at the available recruitment sources at that time, it was the church. If you look at the available recruitment base it was spiritual and comprehensive mentality.

Scenario II: About the 70s I would say, ICA goes secular. Renegotiated reality by interpretation that Christian values may be incompatible and non-facilitative for development in other cultures. That was an interpretation which had a consensual quality that mission values may be incompatible and non-facilitative as you work in other cultures. Nothing really happened at that time because there were a lot of people. The recruitment base was also undeveloped because there was no felt need of recruiting people at that time. People were already doing tremendous work at that time. The existing force was extremely energetic, creative, and productive. That is the golden era of the ICA. You don't need to worry about this part and yet you could go secular.

Now came Scenario III: ICA continues to be secular, expands, there are mutations and evolutions creating new and yet similar forms. Simultaneous growth and decline. Joe Mathews died creating an absence of unified meaning making. With that all of a sudden you had to create meaning for what you are doing which expanded the scope of interpretations of basic values and producing multiple options for mission realization. So all of a sudden there were different ways of realizing what to do. As a result, there is a desirable recruitment base which has a comprehensive development and holistic value orientation. For that the desirable recruitment source will be volunteer segments of interest holders. The available recruitment sources are segmented and specialized volunteer forces. In the 60s you had a volunteer force that would make sacrifices; now times have changed, with the volunteer force very segmented and very specialized. The available recruitment base wants to see tangible outcomes desired based on immediate

actions. You join the Environment or Green Peace because you can see the impact of what you are doing immediately. You can go and stop the hunting of whales and see that you are a success. You can stop pollutants from going into a river and say that you made a difference. So this is availability and this is what you need. So there is incompatibility there. No problem you can get around it, but I don't know how!