



Safar

POLITY

THE NEW POLITY

The Situation:

Local people around the world have given birth to a new ethic of participation. This new ethic is having profound effects upon polity forms within all types of organizations, including our own. All types of institutions are letting go of old bureaucratic and heirarchical polity forms of decision-making and replacing them with more flexible, participative systems based on consensus.

The notion that all the decisions of history belong to all has taken root in people's consciousness around the world! New polity forms are unleashing the creativity of the 85% of humans on the planet who have never before had the chance to contribute significantly to the decision-making process.

Leaders everywhere are struggling to give shape to this new desire to participate and to invent the polity forms which will creatively channel input. The forms of centralization and decentralization are being recreated to allow for rapid exchange of data and interchange at all levels of society. Governments, companies, communities and all societal institutions are either opening their doors to new input (willingly or unwillingly) or are retreating into repressive and antiquated polity forms.

The Four Directions:

BROAD BASED PARTICIPATION

The demand for broad-based participation in the decision-making process appears to be an emerging direction in the new polity. In our time, many people feel left out of the process, but are becoming increasingly aware that they can and must make their voices heard. Therefore, any polity that is devised, must have a structured way of reflecting the participation of people at all levels, and of providing multiple forms of information, dialogue and engagement, as well as a commitment by both leadership and local people to care for the whole and not just respond to those who present their case most forcefully.

ELEMENTS OF CONSENSUS BUILDING

Within the polity dimension of the New Paradigm there is a growing emphasis on decision-making by consensus. Consensus building presupposes a strong covenantal basis within an organization; in some degree or another the body must have a common vision and shared values as well as every member possessing a strong sense of belonging to the group and embodying a strong commitment to its total mission. Without such gluing elements, the consensus process degenerates into either

deciding issues through least common denominators or rendering a veto mechanism for anyone with a differing view. Of course, a strong covenantal relationship doesn't in and of itself ensure consensus; though the process of consensus is essentially an intuitive activity, practical and objective approaches to consensus are possible. Key among these are methods that allow the group to dialogue with each other in ways that the "new" can emerge. This means getting an objective look at all the appropriate data, reviewing the current situation, and authentically expressing every real concern to the rest of the group. Only then is it possible for newgestalts to occur that reveal new solutions. Practical model building is also a crucial element of consensus. Until the group has imagined the orchestration of particular people doing particular actions within particular periods of time, the issue remains an abstract, good idea, no matter how unanimous the agreement. Through these practical models, modification of a decision can occur through the presentation of a new model. Symbolic leadership plays a final critical role in this process. It is through intuitions gained from experience that the leadership states the consensus when it is "reached" or "throws sand" into the process when more work is required for additional model building. These elements are currently emerging within consensus building and through model building. Much work is still required in this arena of polity, but it clearly is a part of the new paradigm of our time.

CENTRALIZATION-DECENTRALIZATION

A third arena in which discussion is occurring is over the question of Centralization vs. Decentralization. In fact, this is probably a false dichotomy.

Directions in polity today are moving toward both greater local autonomy and expanded relationships:

- a) Large corporate and voluntary organizations are becoming increasingly diversified, pluriform and indigenized; often they are expanding in size and operations but at the same time, providing less centralized direction for their component parts, largely because of the diversity they must now encompass.
- b) Smaller organizations are searching out new ways to be related to other groups--for information interchange, co-ordinated efforts related to common interests, objectives and concerns, greater overall effectivity and motivational factors.
- c) The availability of information is one reality which is requiring that decision-making be broadened to lower levels of organizations and communities. This, in turn, is forcing groups to struggle with new styles of middle and lower level management and seek out practical skills training to equip this leadership to deal with this new phenomenon.
- d) There is an increasing demand for occasions that allow discussions and dialogue that cuts across the four sectors, levels within an

organizational structure and culture groupings, to expand the perspectives of the limited framework in which people must operate. e) A move is afoot to shift beyond seeing "democracy" as representational decision-making to finding forms of perpetual participation of everyone.

In summary, there is a great deal of interest in moving into new forms, a sense of the general direction, but a groping toward the practical designs and processes for accomplishing this.

QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP

Directions in the arena of leadership include the fact that the composition is broadening to include minorities, women and others. People everywhere are watching leadership very closely and not allowing decisions to be made without providing input. Leaders will either find ways to involve all who are effected by a decision or they will not be permitted to retain leadership. No longer can leaders engage in win-lose battles. The new leader is called upon to facilitate a consensus through reconciling all parties involved.

FORCES

There are numerous forces affecting the development of polity activities in the world today. Old bureaucracies and decision-making structures are at best slow and often resistant to change. We are experiencing experimentation in function preceding form, and often the old forms are defensively blocking new forms of polity. The utilization of new communication technologies is another major force affecting polity; major news events are flashed instantaneously around the world and extensive information in minute detail is more available than ever before. This availability is a positive force for allowing many people to interpret for themselves, whereas in the past they depended upon interpretation from those who had the data. However, even though this data is more broadly available than ever before, it is still controlled by a relatively few, when put in the global context. The major debates sparked around UNESCO and new proposals for international news services illustrate this. A final force is the overwhelming amount of data that has an intensifying effect. The complexity of issues for those who do have accessibility, tends to swamp imagination.

IMPLICATIONS

The demands upon the Order in the arena of The New Polity are several. We must initially clarify for ourselves, the ways in which we intend to make decisions: which ones are made at what level, how we insure regular every-member participation, etc. Our Models Building Unit interchange must become a prototype for a new system of shared

reflection and models-creation across our global body and within our primary units. We will need to design new modes of Order training in our polity process that invites us all to view it as an evolving, on-behalf-of approach to shaping a global society. This will involve serious exploration of the gifts and the blocks in the different traditional polity modes of the various cultures from which we come and whose images dialogue with the Order's ways of decision-making. It will also involve practical utilization of available new technology to facilitate information-sharing and more rapid and expanded input from diverse perspectives. Our style of leadership must be thought through from the standpoint of providing a visible role model for the world--pluriform, flexible, broad-based, caring and effective consensus-building that works. Then, as an integral part of our futuristic missional task, we need to share our approach and learnings. This entails writing up the remarkable body of insight into this arena out of our practical experience, for use in our training programs, planning consultations and symposia. Finally, we must intensify our direct training efforts with groups and organizations in all sectors and at all levels. This will necessitate sustained, on-going relationships with groups that insure the practical skills transfer to upper and middle management and supervisory-level staff, if vague images are to be transformed into working operational demonstrations.

SHIFTS

Shifts in the arena of polity include a change from a single person taking all the responsibility and making decisions to team responsibility and bottom-up input; from representative democracy to direct participation in decisions which effect the individuals involved; from confrontation to reconciliation; from bureaucratic walls to four-sector cooperation; from isolated success and failure to expanded opportunities for dialogue and interchange. Examples of these shifts include a new openness on the part of the Indian government to involve other sectors in planning and implementation. In corporations around the world, top managers are seeking an increase in productivity and are turning to participatory systems which make work teams more independent and elicit individual creativity.