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WORKSHOPPING METHODS

We want to deal in the whole area of the social methods. The social method, or nodalbuilding method, is a life method. It is not talking about something that takes place beside life. Rather it is bringing radical intentionality to a life process itself. Basically and fundamentally you never want to forget that what lies behind the social methods is deciding in the context of the utterly ambiguous situation you have on your hands, what the future is going to be. The methodology is just the practice of how you go about doing that as a responsible human being.

We want to focus first on the workshop symphony and look at how e workshop is orchestrated. Then we want to look at the area of contradictions, which is a particular kind of content for a particular workshop. In our divisions we have struggled to get clear on Just what a contradiction is, so maybe we ought to talk about that Just a little bit. Then we want to talk about the guru prowess In the workshop method and also the demons the look out for in the whole model building process and particularly the workshop method.

The basic fundamental steps in terms of the workshop symphony are setting the context, brainstorming the data, gestalting the groups wisdom, and the consensus of the group, actualizing the result. This workshop method is underneath method. There are many different kinds of workshops, each geared to a particular context. Therefore, your workshop symphony, what you actually do in a workshop, depends upon what the context is, what the particular problem is that you are working on. ~ workshop, for exanple, on a cadre song is a different kind of workshopthan a workshop on a community problemat. What you actually do in that workshop would be different. Behind that, if you are running a workshop, you would always want to set the context, brainstorm the data, get out a gestalt and establish a consensus. Then when you establish the consensus, that set the context for the next level of the workshop, You might start in a very abstract level and go through this process again and again down through the concrete data that is before you.

In terms of settling the context, you want to look at the whole sweep of history in which this workshop arises, the contemporary world in which you find yourself and the particular life issues that address the group, or the destinal concern that the group has and the context in which that particular workshop arises. It is significant to me that we spend the time that we spend in the PLC setting the context of RSI before moving into the model method. If you have ever tried to go into a workshop on model building for the Local Church with a group of clergy who have not had RSI you understand the cruciality of that context setting period of time. Getting that Context set saves you a great deal of time and makes all the difference in the world in what you come out with in your workshop period. That is not to say that the context in a particular workshop would have to be long and generalized. It could be Just a quick sentence, or a quick image. The context which you set is crucial in exploding imagination. The only reason that you give a lecture before a workshop in a course, for instance, is to explode the imagination and get rid of the t 0 yenta that might be irrelevant to what you are dealing with and to define the arena in which the workshop is going to take place. A clearly defined arena makes all the difference in the world in the way the workshop goes.

In brainstorming the data you are after getting out all the data that you can get on a particular issue that is at all related or is available. One of the basic presuppositions _s that you do not allow arguments on the data. Here is where it takes iron discipline on the part of the person leading the workshop. He just decides to stand over against all his subjective responses to the data that goes up there. Not that he doesn't notice but that he stand over against those and allow those to get up. His basic stance is that the wisdom that is coning out is real wisdom. It may not be evident by what is up on the board but it is real wisdom. It may be that somebody throws out something and it looks nonsensical on the board. It may be only later when you come back and push for real clarity, that you begin to see the insight that is behind the data, or that there is a lot more behind the data than it first appears. You certainly don't want to be naive vet You have data that is far more helpful than other data, and there comes a time in which you need to deal with that. But the discipline calls for you, during the brainstorming time, to just hold yourself like iron, allowing that wisdom to get out. It is your job to just continue to elicit more and more wisdom and to enable that wisdom to get out. Therefore, you have to have a battery of questions that will elicit the data that you need, question that push peoples imagination, so that they get out data that they would never inleially have thought was even there to get out on the subject.

One of the presuppositions here is that the group has the wisdom to deal with the issues. You don't want to be naive about that. If you are workshopping a problem in your cadre and you have your cadre sitting around in a group, then you can pretty well be assured that that group has the wisdom to know an internal problem of that group as it articles concretely in the situation. It can get out a whole fiat of problems and come up with what THE problem is in the cadre. But if you were workshopping your cadre on the solution to some problem in the area of cybernetics, it may well be that you do not have the wisdom sitting around that room Just as it is. The brainstorming process sometimes includes the research that has to go on to get hold of all the related data that is needed to deal with a particular issue that you are struggling with.

As leader of a workshop, you are out to elicit as much data as you can. After you have a whole board full of things, when people are exhausted from putting up a whole board full of things, your question is, "What's left out? What's still not up here? What kind of information, what kind of ideas, or images are not there? " Just at the point when the group senses it has gotten out about all that it can get out, you find six more questions that get out more than you can get up on the board. Somehow you have to say that you have Just pushed the data to the limit. That is Dot to gay that every time you run a workshop you have to get out all the data you may need to cut short that process in that particular situation, but you are always clear that you have decided that over against the fact that you are out to make as much wisdom available as possible to begin to pull together.

When you are working in the area of the gestalt, you are out to reflect on and refine the data. A particular numerical structurea 3 X 5 or a 4 X 4, or a 3 X 3 or whatever, is often a helpful way to hold the gestalt. Pushing to fill the empty boxes pushes your clarity. You may find a whole area where you did not get much data out, and in the midst of that you may have to go back to the brainstorming process again in order to bring rationality to the model. A 4 X 4 also enables you to see that the model is consistent. You may have a discontinuous category in a model, but by pushing the question of consistency in the model, you are clear that you have decided to hold that as a discontinuous category. When you begin to pull together a gestalt, you begin to get objectivity, or you begin to bring rationality, which allows you to stand off and objectively see the relationship of the data and to see what data holds together (including a discontinuous category) and what kind

~ falls by the wayside. Historically this has been talked about as the Aristotelian way and the Platonic way of gestalting. The Aristotelian way is simply to say that the data itself contains the gestalt, or that somehow when you get a whole list of things out, the data has a gestalt hidden within it and your job is to find that. You group things together and find some category that holds them and the gestalt is given by the data. In the Platonic way you take some overarching kind of imagery or analysis of universality --like Economic, Political and Cultural, or Being, Knowing and Doing --that you can apply to hold the situation. Both of those are wrong. You have to use the wisdom of both the Aristotelian way of gestalting and the Platonic way. There is no gestalt which always holds. A master gestalt doesn't just exist. No matter how helpful categories like Economic, Political and Cultural are, they are simply models that we have built to hold reality, and if you group everything in those kinds of categories, it is not helpful in terms of creating history. You have imposed an abstract model upon reality. You have to look for what is in the data that can be grouped together, what kind of things just fall together up on the board. Yet at the same time you have to pull all of your filters out, all of your analysis that you hold reality with in your mind, and shove them in and out to try to get hold of what that data might look like when gestated But a gestalt is created out of pure chaos. There is not any gestalt that is given somewhere, either in overarching Platonic categories or out of the data itself. You create the gestalt. You create it most creatively when you create a number of possible gestalts and bounce them off against each other, and then maybe come up with a whole new gestalt.

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And that gestalt is always created in relationship to the context in which the workshop took place, what you were out to do when you started that workshop. If you lose that context, you will come up with some kind of abstract model that won't be helpful to what you are doing. Last year when we were dealing with the area of dynamic sociology, I remember spending all night one night working on a set of triangles with interrelationships and moving names around and drawing ,arrows. The next day I showed it to a colleague and started to say what it was. He said, 'now, what is the practical problem that you were trying to deal with here?" There was no way for me to answer that because 1 was dealing with an abstract model of pulling together categories and showing their relationships that wasn't out to deal with any kind of practical problem. In pulling together e gestalt or a model, you have to keep in mind what you are out to build that model for in the first place.

Now a word about consensus. A consensus of the group is the context of the next step, but one of the things that we get confused about in terms of consensus is assuming that consensus is something that is tacked on the end of this process. Consensus making is going on at every point in this process,. We usually try to reduce the problem in consensus making to how it gets stated, or how you respond, or whether you say, "Amen." The problem in consensus building is usually in the earlier steps. Maybe the context didn't get set adequately, and therefore people still did not know quite what the arena was that they were working on. Or in the brainstorming session, people were getting out all kinds of data, but they were not being enabled to push themselves to get out the real data out of their own experience of life. Maybe in the arena of gestalt, particularly, they were not being enabled to get their wisdom into a rational construct that would hold that wisdom in a meaningful way. One of the tensions that you are always involved with in gestalting is that of the imaginal picture of the gestalt and the rational picture involved. Those are always being pushed together, or you are always struggling for that tension. If a gestalt is to be the consensus of the group, it has to carry an imaginal power that says back to the group the wisdom that the group got out and formulated, so that it imaginally holds for the group its experience. Yet, you always have a danger of a gestalt becoming highly poetic, and therefore losing contact with the concrete data that you have gotten out or the practical problem that you were out to deal with. So you always have the of problem of keeping it imaginal and yet not getting lost in poetic images, that may have some kind of ethereal satisfaction for the group but is not finally enabling them to hold before themselves the concrete task that they have next, or the context which is being created in this particular workshop.

Now I want to talk a little bit about just what a contradiction is. The term contradiction is a helpful symbol to point to reality. Contradiction is the way life is. Life is contradiction. That is to say, life is a struggle of opposites in a unity. Everywhere you look

there is a struggle of opposites going on within a unity. Dark and Light. War and Peace. Advance and Retreat. Negative numbers and positive numbers. The ruled and the rulers. The universal and the particular. Just everywhere you look there is the struggle of opposites within a unity, and those oppositea do not exist apart from their opposites. That is to say, there is no such thing as advance without retreat, or no such thing as the ruler without the ruled. There is an interdependent relationship between those opposites.

Then you go on and look at the interrelationship of contradictions. That is the same thing that you and I talk about when we say every problem is interrelated.

No problem stands by itself. When you touch one problem you touch every problem and that begins to push in the whole area of what the primary contradiction is. In everyday life you are always struggling with what the contradiction is, what the primary contradiction is. Contradictions exist between things and contradictions exist within things. Contradictions exist between groups of people, and then contradictions exit within groups of people. Contradictions exist between the life of the order and the life of the movement. Contradictions exist within the life of the order, or contradictions exist between penetration and formulation. There are contradictions that exist within penetration. There are all those kinds of complexities. That is just the way life is. In the midst of that interrelationship, you are out to discern at every point what the primary contradiction is.

One of the basic presuppositions behind this is that history is created. That ia a basic image: history is created. You and ~ cal1 decide the shape that history is going to take. History is created by those who have a vision of future, build a model of the future, and go to work on that model. Then in the midst of building a model for the future. building a vision for the future, and beginning to build steps or tactical systems for getting where I a. not into the future vision, in the midst of making that become a reality, I get blocked. I fall in a deep hole. It is like running away from a bull and bumping into a bear. You are moving this way and get blocked, or something is blocking your breakthrough into the future, which would enable your vision to become a reality`` That is where your primary contradiction comes into play. There are many contradictions that are blocking you, ant they are all interrelated, but what you are after is the primary contradiction. It may be one among the many, but more often it is one you have not been able to formulate that holds together the many or the crucial one which will break loose the many. There is no eternal contradiction in every situation. You cannot take some contradiction and say that that is always applicable to every situation in which you find yourself, but rather that that is always changing. You are always out to find the contradiction in the present moment. Even if you get clear on what the contradiction was yesterday, what the contradiction was a week ago, and what the contradiction was a month ago, you can't assume that any of those things are still your contradiction in the immediate situation in which you find yourself. The thing that is universal is that there 's contradiction in the midst of everything. That contradiction always shows up in a particular struggle. And it is always in the midst of a particular struggle that you get blocked in terms of creating the future. It is there that you have to decide what the contradiction is, and what the principal contradiction is that you are struggling with.

Everybody uses that kind of method to some degree of skill even without self-consciousness. I think of the businessman who is always struggling to find what the principal contradiction is, the principal contradiction that is keeping him from reaching his goals as a business man. He looks at his situation, and if he is a good business man, he looks at the fact that the economic condition is such that we have inflation going wild, knowing that in the time of recession you may have a totally different kind of contradiction in your own business than you have in inflation. He is looking for the one thing that is the key to breaking loose his business or to sustain his business, or to keep his business profitable. That is always shifting, and he knows it is always shifting and therefore he is trying to keep his pulse on the market, on the situation in which he finds himself.

You experience this in terms of your family. Maybe you experience a contradiction between your family and the movement. Ever experience that? You have to know the principal contradiction but there is always a principal aspect of the contradiction. There is a contradiction between the family and the movement, and that may go on, but it is crucial that you know what the principal aspect of the contradiction is. At one moment, your relationship to the movement may be where the principal aspect of the contradiction is. At another moment it may be your relationship to your fancily. I was in a meeting the other night and was clear that the principal aspect of the contradiction had to do with my standing over against my druthers in relationship to being at that meetingit had to do with my relationship to the movement. I7hen my wife came in with a crisis at home in relationship to one of the kids, I was clear that the principal aspect of the contradiction had shifted to the family situation at that point. That may be a silly illustration, but we need clarity not only on the principal contradiction, but on the principal aspect of the contradiction. I chink that is helpful to us.

What it is that is blocking the future? There are times at which there is relative rest and there are times in which there is speeded up change. It may be that there are periods of time in social change that things seem to be lying pretty much at rest, and what you are doing is working out your strategies and tactics to deal with the last principal contradiction you got clear on. Then another contradiction begins to emerge, and you are slowed down and blocked. Then you decide what the principal contradiction is and the principal aspect of the contradiction and forge out the strategies and tactics to deal with it and then if you have been correct you break through to the future.

Maybe it would be helpful to use our old image of the soldiers attacking the beach and the contradiction between the pillboxes up on the hill and the men who are assigned to crawl on their bellies on the sand, to hide themselves in nowhere from being attacked. You decide what the principal aspect of the contradiction is a situation like that. You may decide that the principal aspect of the

contradiction has to do with getting up that hill, or maybe the principal aspect is the pillbox, or it may be the men on the beach. If you decide that the principal aspect is the pillbox, because you are down there on the beach and are being pinned down, maybe what you have to do is develop a strategy for getting up that hill, so you go and throw your body on the barbed wire. That is to say, when you decide what the principal aspect of the contradiction is, and you construct a strategy to do that, that is where you lay your body. That is where you put your life. That is what breaks through the future. It is putting your life into your model to deal with the principal contradiction that creates the future.

When the principal contradiction is broker open, it breaks open all kinds of new possibilities. It solves all kinds of problems. Sometimes, when you solve the principal contradiction, other contradictions are solved that you did not even know you had. So it is rather crucial that you figure out what the principal contradiction is in a situation.

How do you decide what the principal contradiction is? You observe, judge, weigh up, and decide You ask questions like, "How would the solution or the transformation of that contradiction release all the contradictions? " You try to get an image in your mind of how if you laid your body against that contradiction that would release the other contradictions. Or you ask the question the other way, negatively " If we don't deal with that what i8 going to happen? " When you look at the whole flat of contradictions and you ask what is going to happen or some other question like that, you begin to get some clarity on which ones are the most awesome possibilities.

One of the things to watch in a workshop, and particularly dealing with contradictions is stating too quickly what the contradiction is. The principal contradiction always is something that you can't articulate at first. You cannot articulate it very quickly. It is very unclear or it would not be the kind of contradiction it is. Not only that, you have to be clear that a major contradiction is something that you are hiding from. When you name the mayor contradiction, you have objectively named your sin. I don't mean to be moralistic about that, but you have named your sin. You never want to do that, so you are always hiding from the mayor contradiction. So it takes ruthless methodology to get said what that major contradlation is.

There are many dangers in articulating the contradiction. One is the danger of subjectivismgetting out too many contradictions from a subjective point of view, not bringing rationality to it. That is like sitting around talking about your major contradiction out of a gut level response to that question, and not getting out objectively the corporate wisdom or getting rational clarity on why that is the principal contradiction. Another danger has to do with onesidedness. This is when you decide one aide of an issue is the contradiction. That is the person who always decides in the midst of the tension between the movemental church and the established church that the problem is with the historic church, or the established church. "That is the way it has always been and that is the way it is always going to be. " He has this doctrine that tells him that, and that is what you have to deal with. He never sees that maybe the principal aspect has switched to the movement church or to the renewal, forces. Or Superficiality. Again, this is trying to formulate the contradiction too quickly, coming up with a cliché, or giving pat answers, rather than struggling with what at the moment, given our situation, is the life and death issue that has to be dealt with if we are to break through to the future possibility.

Next I want to say a few things about guru prowess. The guru, in the workshop, has to know when to p us h and when to release the group. He has to know when to allow individual brooding to go on. Maybe everybody needs to take a wall:, or sleep on it over night, or whatever. Maybe you need to keep pushing hart, hard, hard. Therefore, he has to have a certain kind of detachment from what is going on in the midst of the workshop. The guru controls the rhythm. He controls to A large degree the mood of what is going on. He has to know when you enable a group of people to keep pushing beyond what they thought they know, and when for example, for the group to move in that workshop, they have to somehow ,;et some distance on what they are doing. Maybe they need be to sing a song, or tell a Joke, or have a little laughter. He is the one who knows how to earn the creativeness of tension within the group, and enable it go on and intensify when that is getting the job done, and when and how you use the skills of releasing that tension when that becomes a block. He is the one who is always at every moment clear on what the principal contradiction is in the workshop, or what it is that is blocking that workshop from getting the job done. If it is because you haven't got enough data out, you make them just stay there and work on the data. If it is because they have become giddy and unserious, then he has to find a way to call them back to seriousness. If it is because they are not detached enough, maybe he goes off on a tangent. If it is because they have lost themselves in technique and lost the spirit dimension or motivation of what they are about, then he finds a way to inject that reality. He uses things like images and symbolsour whole corporate wisdom on room set up and decor, the kind of decor that keeps before you the comprehensive context of that workshop and the particular issue that you are dealing with. I had a workshop with a group of community organizers one time in a store front, To the left of me on the wall was one of chose foldouts from Playboy magazine and it was halfway through the workshop before I realized that there was no way of holding people in that workshop to the content as long as that wee on the wall. That says to me the significance of intentional decor. Also the use of rites and songs, stories. The guru has to have a zillion short courses always up his sleeve. Basic principles of work-shopping: When somebody says, "Oh, no, you can't put that idea up. It's wrong. " He has to have a short course that gives the group permission to see that all the data should go up in brainstorming. You don't argue in the midst of brainstorming. He has to have several short courses so that he is not just hitting them over the head but enabling them to see that that is the only way you can get creativity of the group out.

Then you have to have a diversity of method at your disposal. That may depend on the group and what they are working on. There may be a time in which you need to divide the group into small groups, a time when you want to hold them together. There are times

when you want to give them individual work to do, times when you want them to sit around the table and do it, times when you want them to go outside and brood over it. You have all the different kinds of methods at your disposal. Sometimes you want to write phrases. Other times you want to construct sentences or whole paragraphs to get the clarity of the group. The real question is to know why something is needed by the group. You need to ask yourself what is needed by the group -with all these weapons at your disposal-to enable the group to move in a workshop, and then to get clear why you have chosen that method. Are you going to use a black board or chart paper? Why, did you decide to use paper in that particular workshop? Why is that helpful?

All of that is to say that the guru has a kind of detached engagement. He is participating as a colleague in the workshop dynamic, but he always has an iron control. But his iron control is never at the level of content, or at the level of his ideas. He has to be involved enough that he gets inside the content, and knows what it is all about to enable the workshop to move, but the question he is always asking is a methodologica1 question. 'e is clear enough on the content to know when somebody has given a piece of content that does not deal with the question. He is deeply involved, yet he is detached enough to know how to free a group to move, or to unblock a group, because his push is on methodology. That takes fantastic discipline, not to become subjectively involved in the discussion, particularly when you know that model has your life shoved into it too. It takes fantastic discipline to have that kind of detachment that enables you to get the group's wisdom out, rather than imposing your wisdom upon the group. I suppose you would have to say that there are probably highly skilled workshop leaders who could probably move in and out of the role and still hold the workshop together, but that is a highly skilled kind of task. The workshop guru role i8 one of detachment and enabling the group to stay as objective as possible, which releases them to move.

The workshop leader is 8 kind of celebrant. Sometimes we forget a crucial step. That is to celebrate our workto sing a song, or create a ritual. This has to be done with great prowess and care. ~ guru can enable to group to do that. A bunch of bleeding tired warriors who have worked themselves into the ground in a workshop and created something need a way to be resurrected to pick up the model. It transforms those characters into troops that are ready to move into carrying out that model, or move into the next stage in the process.

I want to say just a word on the demons.: The first one is idealism. In workshopping, you can always create an ideal model, an abstract model which does not demand your life. There is also the libertine way, in which you always have a hidden story to yourself that you are not really going to put your life into that model, or that the model that you are building is really something for somebody else, and not for you. A model may always include somebody else that you are building it for, but if it doesn't include you then what are you building it for? If you are not serious about thrusting your life into it, why take precious minutes of your life to build it. 1 suppose all of us have had the experience in cadres, divisions or whatever of building models, yet finding that the group was not serious about doing anything with them. It is like building models because we are supposed to build models, or something like that. Or we decide to get a model built so we can say we built our model. One of the cadres with which I worked for several years reached a point at which it had its motel out of what it was to do in terms of the congregation and parish. We spent a lot of time working on this model. Then it began to become clear that we were not putting that model to work, or that what we were doing was something different than that model. After we began to get that intuition about one of our struggles, we began to objectify the real model that we were operating out of -that is, the one we had been doing as opposed to the one we had built and said we were going to do. As we did that we got clear on a number of things that were wrong with our original model. We had sensed that ant had decided intuitively to do something else. We had unselfconsciously created a model that was more relevant. At the same time, we got clear that we were hiding from the model that we created. We were refusing to do a new thing, refusing to put our lives into that model that we were not living before.

There always is the problem of unseriousness in model building but you also nave to watch very carefully the danger on the other aide, that of moralism. That is the character who wants to take the model and whip the group into doing that model and nothing else from now until we self-consciously create a new model. I think of a colleague who will point you back to some model that was created five years ago, if a new one has not been created in that area, back to some decision that we made when we created a model five years ago at a particular nitty gritty point and just clobber you with that point. That is not to say that there is not a real role for the person who raises the question of obedience to a model. But there is a kind of moralism that goes on which is always clobbering us, or we clobber ourselves with lt.

You create a model that you are going to put your life into. But the minute you put your life into it you know that the reality that you encounter is something different than you anticipated it is going to be. The Situation in always shifting and it is not always necessary to go back and rebuild the whole thing, but you are forging out the revisions of the model in the concrete particular task of carrying out that model. And yet, when you have to raise the question "Are we living out of that model or not, are we being, obedient to it or not?" The question goes back to whether or not, when you built that model, you decided that that was the motel demanded to deal witl1 that issue, whether you are willing to put your life into that model.