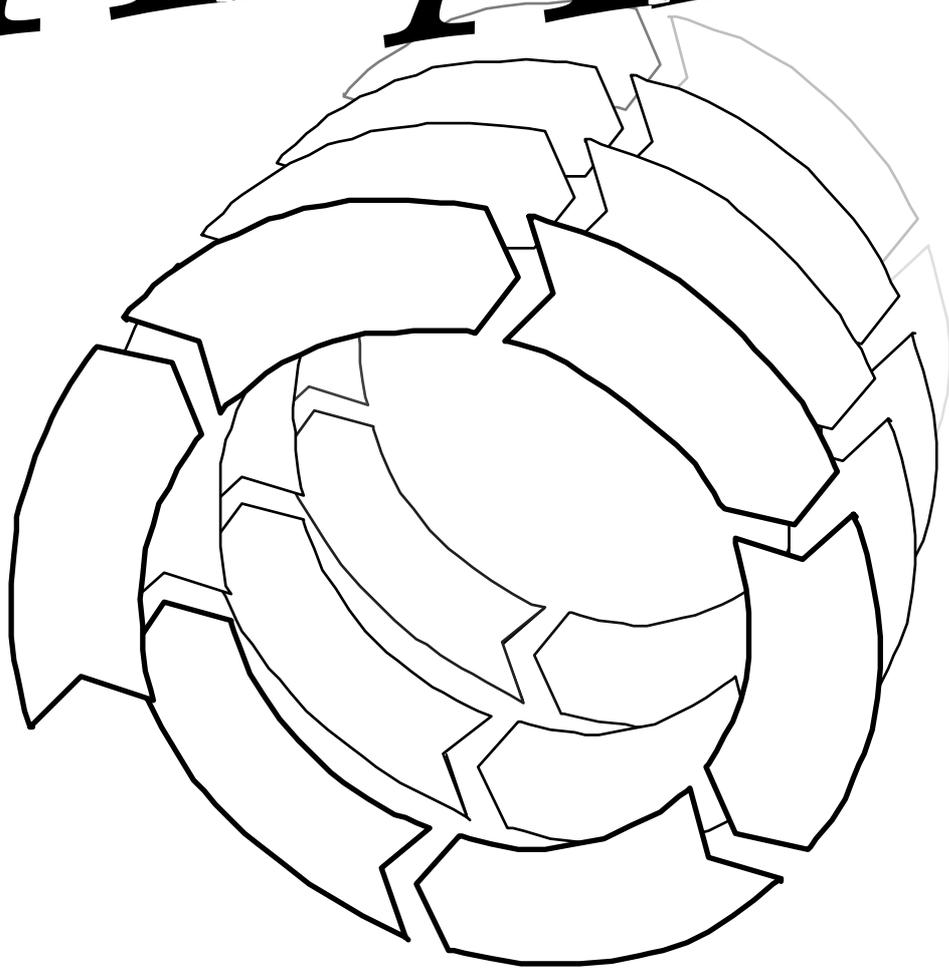


# ALAR



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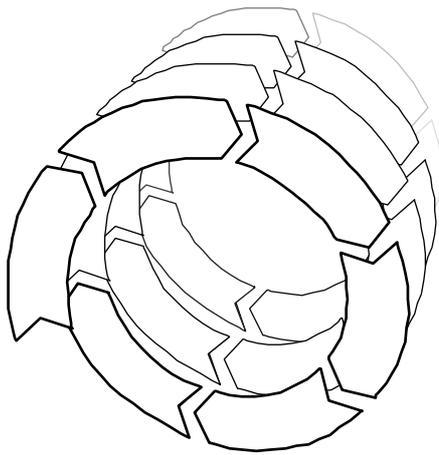
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## **CONTENTS**

<b>Editorial.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The hegemony of rationalism and it's influence on organisations Kevin Lambkin .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Reflections on World Congresses 4/8 on action learning and action research - Cartagena, Colombia, 1997 Ron Passfield.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Projects .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Noticeboard .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>The bookshelf .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Guidelines for contributors .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Publications catalogue order form.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Information for subscribers .....</b>	<b>63</b>

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## Editorial

It is a salutary time to revisit World Congress 4 (May, 1997) through reflections that are shared by people who attended this Congress. Some of the reflections included in this issue are extracted from e-mail messages sent by participants at the Congress to members of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) electronic networks.

The process of Congress design and development is a form of action research on a global basis with a unique timeframe - planning (2 years), action (five days) and reflection (12-18 months). We would hope that the lessons from one Congress are passed via reflection and review to the next Congress.

The article on rationalism and organisations by Kevin Lambkin provides an interesting backdrop for exploring some of the themes of the Congress. It raises one of the fundamental questions that was addressed through the Congress - how can we as people engaged in action research and action learning overcome the hegemony of rationalism and its assault on the human spirit?

This question is taken up by the concluding statement of Orlando Fals Borda who invites us to take advantage of the "hopeful, dynamic, historical leeway" that new horizons will offer in the future. He challenges us to "keep on planting everywhere some of the good seeds of social reconstruction that were sown amongst participants at World Congress 4". The invitation is extended to rejoin again in the year 2000 in Melbourne, Australia (details will be available in the next issue of the ALAR Journal).

We are pleased to announce Orlando Fals Borda's book on World Congresses 4/8 in Bookshelf in this issue of the journal. We have also enclosed order forms for the individual papers that were presented at World Congress 4.

# The hegemony of rationalism and its influence on organisations - Kevin Lambkin

## **Abstract**

The author shares with us his efforts to understand the confounding nature of organisational behaviour in today's corporatist world. His journey leads to an exploration of the ascent and dominance of rationalism and the demise of processes for questioning and challenging the system.

The exploration continues with identification of the influence of rationalism on organisational design and behaviour. This leads to the conclusion that organisations achieve their ends through the adaptability and resilience of the human spirit - despite the debilitating effects of the application of rationalist principles.

In exploring the implications for research and action, the author concludes by questioning whether action research is an adequate response to the hegemony of rationalism and its pervasive influence on organisations.

## **Introduction**

This paper is the first step in a journey of exploration, the genesis of which lies in the author's own small world within a large government bureaucracy, and in the, till now, bewildering paradox which that world consistently and persistently presents.

The paradox is a simple but powerful and confounding one - the incongruence between formal or official organisational structure, process and attitude on the one hand; and the reality of the behaviour of organisational players on the other. The following specific examples, which are by no means exhaustive, illustrate the phenomenon -

- 'management by objectives' processes and structures (developed and redeveloped over and over again at great organisational cost, time and effort) simply ignored, or treated perfunctorily and/or superficially;
- compulsory processes for the selection of staff designed to guarantee 'absolute meritocracy' (with the notion of merit defined in strictly mechanistic terms) which are implemented to the letter but not in reality - the reality being that staff are selected on an intuitive assessment of best fit taking into account a complex diversity of social, political, personal and other factors;
- annual performance monitoring and sanctioning processes for staff, again supposedly rigorously rational, but again treated with disdain by the players for their self-evident simplification of the inherently complex nature of a person's relationship with, and contribution to, an organisation.

The consistency and persistency of examples such as these in all similar bureaucracies of which I am aware deny simplistic assessments which might be tendered - 'the processes aren't being implemented properly', 'people have not been adequately trained', 'inadequate control of staff', etc. These and like organisational processes do, however, share a consistent and fundamental quality which provides an entry point into an explanatory framework which has high resonance with my experience. The fundamental quality is that of rationalism - they are all 'evidence-based', 'rigorous', 'scientific' - they are all 'independent' of the assumed irrationality and capriciousness of humans. In our society such rationalism seems to carry an unquestioned and almost

sacred legitimacy. It seems to have become the fundamental standard by which society wishes to measure itself.

As indicated earlier, this paper is a first step - a report of my initial and modest foray into the literature which seems to offer an explanatory framework for the above paradox. As such, the paper discusses two subjects - the ascent and dominance of rationalism in Western society, and the influence which this dominance has had on organisations. These subjects provide some insight into why my organisation is beset with supposedly rational processes and structures which tenaciously maintain their iconic status notwithstanding persistently incongruent human behaviour. They also suggest why many organisations function successfully in spite of such processes and structures rather than because of them. The principal signposts for this foray have been John Ralston Saul's analyses (1993, 1997a) of the hegemony of rationalism in Western society, and Gareth Morgan's (1997) 'ways of seeing' organisational phenomena.

### **The ascent and dominance of rationalism**

John Ralston Saul, in two landmark books, *Voltaire's Bastards* and *The Unconscious Civilization*, traces the ascent of rationalism from its origin in the 'Age of Reason' - the transformation which occurred in Western society during the 17th and 18th centuries through the efforts of a range of philosophers in Europe, England and North America, the most important of whom was Voltaire. This transformation saw a diminution in the influence of superstition and in the exercise of arbitrary power by hereditary and church elites, and the birth of the idea of government through 'a new philosophical coalition of reason balanced with humanism' (Saul 1993, p.7). Voltaire's conceit was thus based on an essential balance - reason as a basis for informed insight in examining, explaining and shaping human affairs, and humanism which acknowledged the essential human qualities of individuals and society.

Saul's thesis, however, is that in the intervening period

humanism has proved unable to balance reason, and that Western society is now firmly in the grip of a 20th century 'Age of Reason', an Age dominated by powerful elites and interest groups who organise society 'around answers, and around structures designed to produce answers' (Saul 1993, p.7). In his *Unconscious Civilization*, Saul develops the concept of corporatism as the dominant ideology of Western society. Corporatism claims rationality as its central quality, a rationality which in Saul's analysis 'denies both the complexity of the human and the complexity of human society' (Saul 1997a, p.169), or in Gareth Morgan's words results in human alienation through its assault on the human spirit (Morgan 1997, p.12).

The essential qualities of Saul's corporatist world and its 'dictatorship of reason' are as follows (summarised from Saul 1993, 1997a, 1997b):

1. The ascendancy of reason as a moral weapon with the inevitable conclusion that the solution to society's problems lies in the determined application of rationally organised expertise.
2. The marginalization of other human qualities - spirit, common sense, doubt, perception, faith, emotion, intuition, experience; and a denial of our most important instincts - the democratic, the practical, the imaginative.
3. An obsession with certainty, with absolute answers, with simplification (where in reality there is great complexity), and with the need to remove uncertainty.
4. A fixation with, and servility to intricate structures, systems and processes which are developed through the application of a clean, unemotional logic.
5. The denial of history - successive absolute answers are provided for major public problems without reference to previous experience.

6. The creation in the individual of passivity and conformity in those areas which matter, and non-conformism in those which don't.
7. An obsession with efficiency as a value in itself - 'All the things technocrats fear are incapable of efficiency: risk, thought, doubt, admission of error, research and development, long-term investment, commitment' (Saul 1997a, p.127).
8. A fixation with specialist knowledge and expertise, and with arcane technical dialects which split the language into a public and a corporatist domain. It therefore becomes difficult for anyone, either insider or outsider, to grasp reality.
9. A passion for control though structure, systems, processes and expertise.
10. A fixation with management - the result of the obsession among the corporatist elites with control, and with form over content.
11. A fixation on quantification ('to add precision to reasoning about the world' - McNamara 1995, p.6), measurement and planning.
12. An obsession with haste (in reality as a means of control and power) - problems need solving through efficiently rational processes, without the need for considered reflection by society at large.

In response to the emphatic dominance of these qualities in modern Western society, Saul and other contemporary writers (*eg* Ehrenfeld 1993, Soros 1997) call for a recognition of the limitations of reason and the reassertion of humanism with its attendant qualities of common sense, creativity, ethics, intuition and memory - 'The time is ripe for developing a conceptual framework based on our fallibility. Where reason has failed, fallibility may yet succeed' (Soros 1997, p.58). Similarly Saul calls for the re-emergence of

doubt and the re-establishment of language as the medium of debate, critique and reform.

### **In defense of rationalism**

Paradoxically Saul's exposure and assault on the destructive effects of the dominance of rationality in Western society does not diminish the inherent value or desirability of rationality in humans and in human society. Saul himself makes clear that he is not attacking reason *per se*, but rather the dominance of reason, and reason as an ideology - 'Sensibly integrated along with our other qualities [*viz* common sense, creativity, perception, memory, etc], reason is invaluable' (Saul 1997a, p. 103).

The concept of reason as an ideology was presaged in the earlier work of Karl Mannheim (1940), and also that of Max Weber in his writings on bureaucracy (see Mouzelis 1967). Mannheim made the critical distinction between 'functional' (instrumental-bureaucratic) rationality where people are expected to fit into a predetermined mechanical design, and 'substantial' rationality where people use intelligent insight to challenge and question the system of relationships of which they are part. Functional rationality thus does not imply that a person 'carries out acts of thinking and knowing', but simply means organised behaviour where every action has a functional role to play in achieving the ultimate aim (Mannheim 1940, p.53). It is the concept of 'functional rationality' to which Saul and other writers refer in their assault on the 'Age of Reason'.

The distinction between the two rationalities is not only fundamental to Saul's and others' analyses, but is also pertinent to any consideration of the effect of the societal hegemony of (functional) rationality in organisations (discussed below). Of particular relevance is Mannheim's prescient observation that as functional rationality increases, the capacity for substantial rationality decreases. Indeed Mannheim presages Saul's analysis of the place of the individual in corporatist society - 'The average person

surrenders part of his own cultural individuality with every new act of integration into a functionally rationalized complex of activities' (Mannheim 1940, p.59).

### **Rationalism and organisations**

The emergence of a common Western society culture of which organisations are an integral component has been emphasised in Presthus' notion of an 'organisational society' (1978 - referred to by Morgan 1997). Modern organisations, as an integral part of society, inherently share that society's fixation with rationality and are therefore 'sustained by belief systems which emphasise the importance of rationality' (Morgan 1997, p.146). In such a society, organisations, to maintain their legitimacy in the public eye, are obliged to be, or at the very least, appear to be, integrated rational enterprises pursuing a clearly defined goal.

The increasing rationalism (or bureaucratism) of organisations is therefore simply a manifestation of increasing rationalism in society (Weber, as summarised in Mouzelis 1967, Chapter 1), although it should be stressed that the relationship is not one of cause and effect, but rather one of mutual reinforcement. This hegemony of rationalism has the following effects on organisations.

#### *Mechanistic models of organisation predominate*

As a result of rationalism's hegemony, 'we have learned to use the machine as a metaphor for ourselves and our society and to mold our world in accordance with mechanical principles' (Morgan 1997, p.12). The structuring and running of organisations along mechanistic lines (with the imposition of rational goals and objectives, performance targets, 'human resource' management systems, and sophisticated communication systems as the basis for communication, coordination and control) has thus become the accepted model for the way organisations should function.

The archetypal models for the mechanistic approach are

'classical management theory' (as described, for example, by Fayol 1949), which focuses on the design of the total organisation through rational planning, structure, command, coordination and control; and 'scientific management' ('Taylorism' - see Taylor 1947), which focuses on the design and management of individual jobs. The ascendancy of rationalism in the late 20th century has ensured that models such as these (and their modern descendants - 'management by objectives', 'program planning and budgeting systems', 'management information systems', etc - see von Ward 1981, p.115) have even more firmly emphasised their dominance in business schools and in organisations.

Mechanistic approaches thus predominate our ideas about organisations - their functional rationality holds an irresistible attraction to a society seduced by certainty, efficiency and control over people and their activities.

*The denial of 'other ways of seeing' organisations*

Gareth Morgan in his book *Images of organisation* has adopted the concept of metaphor in enunciating a range of established and innovative theories of organisation. The use of the concept of metaphor is a powerful way of promoting different ways of thinking about and seeing organisations. In addition to the mechanistic metaphor, Morgan also outlines metaphors of organisations as organisms, as brains, as cultures, as political systems, and as psychic prisons.

The organism metaphor, in incorporating established theories of human relations and contingency, focuses on the social needs of the workforce as well as the organisation's fit and response to its environment. The metaphor prompts a diverse range of approaches such as the encouragement of worker self-control and creativity to create enriched and motivated jobs, the implementation of matrix or project organisations to promote flexible environmental responses, *et al.* Such approaches, however, are more than often implemented within the context of a rationalist/mechanistic framework and as a result invariably fail.

The brain metaphor describes the complex brain-like, and often superficially irrational, decision making processes within organisations. It suggests a cybernetic approach to the development of learning organisations through the utilization of double-loop learning. Such an approach requires a range of settings, all of which are fundamentally inconsistent with the dominant rationalist framework -

- cultures which support change and risk taking,
- the accommodation of rapidly changing circumstances where high degrees of uncertainty, problems and errors are inevitable,
- recognizing the legitimate error which arises from uncertainty and lack of control (Morgan 1997, p.94).

Similarly the 'holographic' brain metaphor for developing learning organisations requires qualities such as -

- inbuilt redundancy of functions (vs efficiency of the rationalist),
- a minimum spec approach - define no more than is absolutely necessary (vs clearly defined objectives and targets of the rationalist),
- requisite variety - internal complexity which matches that of the environment (vs simplification and conformity of the rationalist) (Morgan 1997, p.105-115).

In summary, rationalism with its fixation on control, efficiency and certainty cannot accommodate the self-organising and emergent processes which the brain metaphor encourages.

With respect to the metaphor of organisations as cultures, the rationalist/mechanistic approach inherently denies the influence of factors such as ideologies, values, beliefs, language and norms. When cultural change is attempted (*eg* through quality improvement initiatives), such initiatives often simply become yet another program and process

embedded in the hegemonic rational framework of the organisation.

The admission of organisations as political systems (Lucas 1987), as comprising 'loose networks of people with divergent interests who gather together for the sake of expediency' (Morgan 1997, p.166) is fundamentally incongruent with the notion of the integrated rational enterprise.

Similarly, in the psychic prison metaphor, the reality of emotions such as aggression, greed, fear and hate is not part of the rationalist organisational agenda.

*'Demoralization of the producers'* (Ehrenfeld 1993, p.58)

The dominance of functional rationalism in organisations (with its emphasis on control) has a debilitating effect on the human spirit. In Max Weber's view we become dominated by the forces which underpin the quest for rationality - 'impersonal principles and the quest for efficiency become our new slave drivers' (Morgan 1997, p.306).

The mechanistic definitions of job responsibilities, the subtle or not so subtle control on the grounds of accountability, the fixation on means and ends and costs and benefits, perpetual reorganisation in the vain search for the 'right' mechanistic structure, and daily existence in a world of deception and unreality lead to low morale, despondency, and often the adoption of mindless, unquestioning attitudes, all of which derogate against desirable organisational qualities such as initiative and flexibility (Morgan 1997, p.29; Ehrenfeld 1993, p.58; von Ward 1981, p.57-60).

As Mannheim (1940) and Weber (as summarised in Mouzelis 1967, Chapter 1) pointed out over 50 years ago, the rational mechanistic approach limits rather than mobilizes the development of human capacities.

*A single 'correct' theory of organisation*

The rationalist fixation with certainty and ultimate answers

logically leads to the conclusion that there must be a single correct theory of organisation. Comparisons of 'classical management', 'scientific management', 'human relations', 'neo-Weberian', 'contingency' and other theories in much of the literature are therefore aimed at finding the single most appropriate approach (for example, see Perrow 1972). As Morgan (1997, p.347) points out, however, organisations are incredibly complex, and the rationalist need to have a single all purpose model inhibits the capacity to gain an overall view which acknowledges and accounts for the complexity.

*Predominance of linear 'cause and effect' thinking*

The rationalist world is one of simple cause and effect relationships, the result of 'thinking in lines'. This is probably best exemplified by the almost universal adoption by organisations of the hierarchical pyramid (although usually presented as two-dimensional only) - a structure based on the simplistic notion of linearity in the relationships of concepts, actions and people. (von Ward 1981, p.76). Such linear thinking denies the multifaceted reality of organisations which are complex non-linear systems comprising multi-dimensional patterns of relationships.

*Theory becomes ideology*

The eternal rationalist quest for answers and certainty has the inevitable result that theories (or hypotheses, or metaphors, or images), which should be no more or less than insightful and empowering hypotheses for natural or societal phenomena, become ideologies - implementable sets of 'normative guidelines for shaping practice' (Morgan 1997, p.71). As Morgan points out, the idea that the organisation is a machine thus converts into the ideology that organisations should be run like machines, and Taylor's theory that 'efficiency and productivity is in the interests of all' (Morgan 1997, p.71) becomes the ideology of scientific management.

Unlike theories in natural science, theories in social science have a reflexive effect on their phenomena - through

application they become ideologies which then re-configure the subject matter to which they relate (Soros 1997).

### **Why then does rationalism thrive in organisations and society?**

Notwithstanding the above litany of negative effects which rationalism has on organisations, all of which are pertinent in my own organisational situation, organisations (including my own) still produce, accommodate and evolve with their environment, and provide at least some sense of well-being for their members. The explanation of this seeming paradox lies in the innate capacity and incredible skill of most individuals (in spite of the demoralizing and debilitating effects of rationalist techniques) in being able to accommodate, negotiate, compromise and manoeuvre their way through the social, cultural, political, psychic, conceptual, as well as rationalist minefield which organisations, be they large or small, present. In this context, I offer the following explanation for the paradoxical phenomenon of my own workplace described in the Introduction:

- The organisational structures and processes listed represent the manifestation of a mechanistic model of organisation with its predictable focus on certainty, simplification, linear thinking, efficiency and control.
- In adopting the mechanistic model the organisation confirms its almost inevitable status as simply another cog in the hegemony of rationalism in Western society.
- Even though the structures and processes do not reflect the reality of organisational life, their maintenance and continued rebirth in 'improved' form is assured by the hegemony of rationalism.
- The few attempts to adopt 'other ways of seeing' (eg staff participation and empowerment, project team approaches, quality initiatives) founder in their incompatibility with the strong mechanistic framework.

- In paying lip service to mechanistic techniques but acting otherwise, organisational members demonstrate the fragmented culture of the organisation.
- In spite of the certainty, efficiency, and control which rationalist techniques attempt to impose on the organisation, most of its members are intelligent and insightful enough to be able to -
  - recognize the poverty and naive simplicity of rationalist techniques,
  - accommodate the psychic, social, cultural, political, conceptual, and environmental complexity of their organisational world, and
  - adapt, with varying degrees of success, to the inherent paradoxes which that world presents and in so doing contribute effectively to the organisation's *raison d'être*.

As a general conclusion, this paper suggests that organisations in the grip of the rationalist ideology survive and thrive not because of their rationalist structures and processes, but primarily because of the capacity of the human spirit to respond with insight and adaptation when challenged with inherent as well as ideologically driven complexity, uncertainty and paradox.

### **Implications for action and reseach**

Because of the hegemony of the rationalist ideology at the societal and institutional level, it is suggested herein that change and reform within organisations can only occur through the 'emancipatory' actions of the participants (practitioners) themselves. The bewildering and debilitating daily organisational lives of these practitioners are clearly a powerful stimulus for them to seek information, and to participate in processes which expose and offer responses to the 'assumptions, habit, precedent, coercion and ideology' (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p.192) of their organisational world.

Research programs which provide such information and/or processes may be interpretive or action based.

In an interpretive research program, the independent researcher, through interview, observation, document study and/or other techniques, would seek to identify and expose the debilitating paradox of individual or overall rationalist organisational processes and practices. Mintzberg's (1975) research and literature synthesis on the mythology of managerial practices provides a good model for such an interpretive research program.

The aim of such interpretive research is thus to 'transform the consciousness of practitioners ... [and] ... give them grounds upon which to decide how to change themselves' (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p.219). In the light of the institutional hegemony of the rationalist processes being critiqued, however, such an approach depends solely on the persuasive power of its advocates and on the very limited ability of practitioners, constrained by this hegemony, to be able to respond. In the case of Mintzberg's research, for instance, in spite of the wide publication and promulgation of his exposition of the mythology of managers, these myths still strongly dictate much organisational practice.

An action research program, on the other hand, involves and is controlled by the practitioners themselves, and as 'critical social science', it is 'explicitly conceived with the purpose of overcoming felt dissatisfaction', with the aim of 'enlightened self-knowledge and effective political action' (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p.157). An action research program of change and reform of rationalist organisational practices and processes (and ideologies?) therefore involves the initiation of collaborative and cooperative projects which proceed through a 'spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, with each of these activities being systematically and self-critically implemented and interrelated' (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p.165). Its aims are not only to improve practice, but more importantly, in the present context, to

improve the understanding of the practice by the practitioners, and improve the situation in which the practice occurs. Unlike an interpretive research approach which simply offers a theory or explanation which can then be proselytised, an action research program involves practical transformations of the existing social reality of the situation.

Is action research an adequate challenge to the hegemony of rationalism?

The major critique which can be made of the action research agenda is its individual situation or single organisation focus - how can enlightenment and transformation occur even at those levels when the framework and groundrules are dictated by the hegemonic rationalist ideology? Action research advocates such as Carr and Kemmis (1986, p.206), in acknowledging this constraint, note that action researchers, in becoming critically-informed reformers, inherently represent a challenge to established authority. How such an action research driven challenge can expose, assault and transform powerful societal ideologies (such as rationalism) which inherently drive organisational process and practice remains problematical.

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# Reflections on World Congresses 4/8 on Action Learning and Action Research - 1997 - Ron Passfield

World Congress 4 on Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management was held concurrently with the 8<sup>th</sup> World Congress on Participatory Action Research at Cartagena, Colombia from 31 May to June 5 1997 under the convenorship of Orlando Fals Borda. The Congress theme was "Convergence in Knowledge, Space and Time".

In this paper I am attempting to pull together some reflections on the processes used at the World Congress in Cartagena. Reflections on the content and themes of the Congress are provided in the recently released compilation by Orlando Fals Borda, *People's Participation: Challenges Ahead* (details of which are provided in "Bookshelf").

I will draw on Orlando's publication, e-mail messages produced by Congress participants and my own observations. The e-mail messages were sent by Congress participants to members of the global PAR network through the electronic communication service provided at the Congress by Carla Schafer of Cornell University.

1,850 people from 61 countries participated in the Congress - a truly global event. Delegates were deeply moved by Paulo Freire's posthumous message to the Congress which was read during the formal opening. Paulo's words addressed to

the “Friends of Convergence” mirrored the agenda of much of the Congress:

*I hope we can meet in another opportunity to reminisce and to think about how to continue with our struggles. Above all we must fight against the power of the dominant neoliberal ideology that keeps on offending and attacking the human nature while reproducing itself socially and historically, threatening dreams, utopias, and hopes.*

The hopes and dreams of the Congress Organisers were severely tested in the early stages of the Congress. These challenges came from (1) the unexpected high number of participants, (2) the discontent caused by the formality of the opening ceremony, and (3) the discrimination felt by women at the Congress because visibility was denied to them in favour of distinguished male guests and “gurus”. This latter issue was resolved when the women took the matter into their own hands to ensure equality of presentation. The intervention by the women highlighted the richness that can be lost where equity in participation is overlooked through other pressures. However, it must be said that the Organising Committee responded swiftly to the problem.

Orlando addresses each of these three issues in his own reflection on the early stages of the Congress (Reflection 1) and observes that through the action of the women and constructive interventions by others “the Congress gained its internal participative equilibrium and held it until the final days”. The Congress moved through these early stages of reconciliation and developed into a real community of interest, energy, enthusiasm and vitality, enriching the lives of many participants through the spontaneous networking that emerged. What developed was a truly historic event in the life of action learning and action research.

Davydd Greenwood of Cornell University (USA) observed that:

*...the Congress became a social event which showed progress in three ways: 1. The universal encounter of diverse schools and trends within our field, something unthinkable before. This taught us so many things that the event must be seen as a milestone in the history of our disciplines; 2. The more intense North South dialogue and the contact between the Souths; and 3. The discovery of the Latin American dynamic activism and of the importance of Spanish as an international language. (Fals Borda, 1998, p.2)*

Networking between such diverse groups of people was aided by a range of processes that were built into the Congress design. The Congress structure included plenary sessions, group discussions of sub-themes, conversations with distinguished PAR practitioners, panel and roundtable discussions and evaluative summaries. Other scheduled processes included:

- Cultural activities held in the evenings in the beautiful Convent of St. Francis (singing, dance and orchestral music)
- Music and Narratives Room ( with a program of music and narratives from Colombia, Chile, Australia, Mexico, Cuba)
- Video Room ( with videos covering PAR experiences in countries such as Colombia, Australia, Canada, England and the USA)
- “Garden of Proposals” - spontaneous offerings from groups of delegates (coordinated by the Congress Secretariat)
- Reading Room (with publications on action learning and action research donated from around the world for the Congress and the National Library)
- Displays of photos, videos, tapestry and books on People’s Participation

- Sales of publications and distribution of promotional material
- Spontaneous photographs of delegates mingling, presenting or participating by the roving photographer.

One of my more moving experiences occurred at the end of a plenary session organised by a panel of women. The Chair of the session asked one of the Colombian delegates to lead the Congress participants in spontaneous singing - 1,000 delegates holding hands, swaying and singing together a local and very moving song in Spanish. It was an incredible experience to participate in an expression of community with people from so many countries. This was one occasion when the Spanish language became an international language.

The use of two main languages, Spanish and English, during the Congress led to a number of interesting, challenging, and sometimes humorous, experiences. Some of these experiences are covered in the reflections included below (Reflections 2 & 3). The challenge for English-speaking delegates was that, for once, they were vastly outnumbered by the Spanish-speaking delegates. This realisation brought its own insights:

*The confusion (difficulties, joyfulness, frustration, embarrassment, resentment, weariness, and the halting pace) of translation of different languages at the conference created a concrete parallel awareness of the different ways of seeing and being and knowing as people from different parts of the world. (Nancy Grudens-Schluck -USA and Eileen Piggot-Irvine - NZ)*

The Congress community struggled with many complex issues in an environment where the gap between the powerful and powerless was real and very visible. The contextual differences between PAR in this environment and PAR in the Western world were borne out by Yolanda

Wadsworth in her e-mail communication from the Congress:

*...a contrast was obvious between our Latin American friends working with harsh and dangerous struggles around basic human needs and Westerners working with struggles around morale and spirit and repressive tolerance.*

Despite these differences in context, Yoland was able to identify similarities in the nature of the struggle (Reflection 4). However, delegates were continually confronted with the harsh realities present in the Latin American environment. For example, a field visit organised for Congress delegates to the Henequen community in Cartagena, proved to be an extremely challenging and moving experience as is illustrated by the reflections of Colin Fletcher and Leon White (Reflection 5).

In his concluding summary given at the final panel of the Congress, Orlando Fals Borda argued that we need “courage and imagination” if we are to become “builders and defenders” of a better world and if we are “to stop the self-destructive rituals of exploitative dominant systems” (Reflection 6). He invites us “to take advantage of this dynamic, historical leeway for hope” reflected in the Congress and to progress social reconstruction until we meet again in Melbourne, Australia in the year 2000.

## **REFLECTION (1)**

### **The Formal Opening - Orlando Fals Borda**

*The World Congress for Participatory Convergence in Knowledge, Space and Time was considered a State project by the Colombian Government. It offered a good opportunity to correct the image of the country abroad, so that more representative situations of local social realities could be shown; and it was meant to foster direct contacts of Colombian scientists and intellectuals with foreign colleagues. Enough resources and political supports were therefore given to the Congress organisation, thanks to the good offices of*

*President Ernesto Samper Pizano, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rodrigo Pardo and Maria Emma Mejia, and the Minister of National Education, Jaime Nino Diez. The Congress was also sponsored by President Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil, and by the Brazilian Ambassador at Bogota, Synesio Sampaio Goes for reasons of collegueship and Latin American solidarity. UNESCO was represented by Sub-Director General Francine Fournier, for present and historical reasons as it had also sponsored the First Action Research Symposium of 1977.*

*These official supports plus obvious facts of protocol unavoidable in Colombian circumstances led to an opening session characterized by hierarchy (abundant presence of high public officials), patriarchy (a majority of men on the stage) and an absence of the Indian, Black, and Oriental colleagues at the head table.*

*This initial formality was criticized by alert delegates because it diminished general participation. Participatory levels had in fact been higher in the previous, smaller Congresses held in Australia and England. The problem was compounded by the unexpectedly high number of registrants, which kept increasing up to the last day of the event. They were of course welcome, but the cumbersome initial situation underlined a deeper fact: that the organisers had not succeeded in modifying the cultural format of academic meetings to give way to other spaces set up in accordance with the democratic orientations of Participatory Research. We were expected to be more consistent in relating our ideals to our practice.*

*It was fortunate that such tensions were soon eased by the participants themselves through happily spontaneous means derived from programmed cultural and artistic activities, and also from positive interventions by group rapporteurs like Peter Reason, Gustavo De Roux, Budd Hall, Marja Liisa Swantz, Pat McGuire, and others who acted promptly and constructively. In a similar way, women delegates who felt an early discrimination organised themselves and took over the final sessions, presiding with eloquence and distinction. With such inputs, the Congress gained its internal participative equilibrium and held it until the final days.*

*According to further reports, general satisfaction came from the variety and flexibility of the intellectual and artistic menu offered by the event. Each person was able to “make her/his own Congress”, to enjoy a “happening” or vivencia according to anyone’s interests. The most intense recollections appear to be those related more to that informal programming than to scheduled items.*

Source: Orlando Fals Borda (ed) 1998, *People’s Participation: Challenges Ahead*, pp. 1-2

(A compilation and analysis of the Congress - refer “Bookshelf” for more details)

## **REFLECTION (2)**

### **Simultaneous translation in plenary sessions - Nancy Grudens -Schuck (USA) and Eileen Piggot- Irvine (NZ)**

*When several hundred of us converge in plenary sessions, we gather in the Barahona Room. Presenters approach a central microphone, some comfortably, some with the humour of novelty. If there are ten or more presenters, they sit at long, two-tiered tables. No matter how many, presenters seem small against the magnificent floor-to-ceiling backdrop in black and psychedelic colours announcing: CONGRESOS MUNDIAL/WORLD CONGRESSES. The tables are centered by the splendour of bird of paradise flowers. These flowers flash rich pink, muted orange, blood red. For several minutes, the presenters and helpers adjust microphones, spotlights, video recorders, video cameras, and the criss-cross of extension cords. The translators, mainly women whose voices are now familiar, sit high above the crowd in their special booth. Sometimes, presenters nod to the translators as they begin. Making a guess about which language will come from the presenter in front of them, attendees will either settle the earphones of their translation devices around their heads, or leave them idle in their laps.*

*As presenters speak, photographers saunter to the front to crouch and flash cameras. More apologetically, the exceptionally interested*

*crouch nearby with hand held audiorecorders. During these sessions, jokes are doubly appreciated. People who understand the presenter's original language laugh first. As the translation reaches listeners of the **other** language, a second wave of appreciative laughter echoes the first.*

Source : extract from e-mail dated 6 June 1997 issued from the Congress Communications Centre

### **REFLECTION (3)**

#### **Managing language differences in workshop sessions**

##### **Ron Passfield (Australia)**

*It is a challenging experience to be in the minority in a conference of this size. The predominant language is Spanish and I am English-speaking. I have little or no understanding of the spoken Spanish language.*

*The conference has made me acutely aware of how many countries have Spanish as their primary language. It has also made me aware of how the language divide has impeded the exchange of ideas and resources between English-speaking and Spanish-speaking people. In one sense, this Congress attempts to achieve a convergence that crosses this divide so that there is a real sharing of knowledge in this space and time.*

*I also became aware of my own hypocrisy in insisting that people who come to a predominantly English-speaking conference should learn English, when I have not done the same in relation to Spanish at this conference.*

*Despite the difficulties of language, I have had some very rich experiences at this Congress.*

*On Tuesday, I found myself giving an impromptu paper on organisational change to a group of Spanish-speaking people. One of the group offered (courageously) to act as interpreter and proceeded to translate what I had to say phrase by phrase.*

*I found myself choosing my words carefully, avoiding jargon and gesticulating expansively as a way of closing the language gap.*

*The interpreter experienced some difficulties but was eventually helped out by a number of other people who joined the group. The process of these interpreters operating together enriched my understanding of the concept of "negotiated meaning".*

*I was able at the start of the presentation to ascertain what the participants were studying or doing, and why they had come to this session. I then used this information to give examples during my presentation because it gave me words and phrases that the participants could understand and were interested in.*

*I found that I was much more aware of the non-verbal channels than usual because the auditory channel did not make sense (I could only understand a few words here and there).*

*I also observed other groups and how they handled the issue of the language barrier. Some strategies were:*

- 1) Someone from the group volunteered to be the interpreter and stood by, or sat with, the presenter. Interpretation was offered phrase by phrase, paragraph by paragraph, or in larger blocks of meaning.*
- 2) Minority groups (Spanish or English) sat to one side and were given simultaneous translation by a volunteer interpreter.*
- 3) In other situations, where the minority group was small, they chose to go to another group of like-speaking people.*

*Some humorous situations arose when fluent interpreters crossed between languages without being aware they had done so. (If only I could suffer such problems of fluency!)*

*My major regret and frustration was that sometimes I was cut off from the knowledge and wisdom of Spanish-speaking people because of my lack of understanding of the language. This was somewhat alleviated by the simultaneous translation provided during plenary sessions. I am only hoping that through my continued exposure to the Spanish language, I will absorb more*

*and more meaning and come away with a considerably enhanced knowledge and new friends and contacts.*

Source : extract from e-mail dated 5 June 1997 issued from the Congress Communications Centre.

## **REFLECTION 4**

### **Similarities and differences in the context of PAR**

#### **Yoland Wadsworth (Australia)**

*I took part in a session all day Monday concerned with Intercultural, Integration and Social Services issues – convened by Elias Sevilla Casas from Universidad del Valle here in Colombia. Elias provided a poster depicting a context for our discussions – focusing on the two conceptual groups of the “dolientes”- the hurt, suffering, disadvantaged, or clients, patients, consumers: the critical reference group, on the one hand; and on the other - the more powerfully-operating authorities, human services professionals, bureaucracies and so on; and the third conceptual group of the facilitators of PAR/inquiry - and their relationship to the others.*

*Elias noted that we worked greatly in the 1960s and 1970s with the dolientes; but by the 1980s and 1990s it was seen that it was not enough for change to take place only in this group - and a new phase began of facilitating the dialogic engaging with the powerfully operating groups for their transformation also. In this effort, in my own presentation, I noted that some of us moved from a go-between role of bringing messages from the dolientes to the powerful and attempting to convey to the dolientes the situation of the professionals and administrative authorities, to a role of facilitating direct dialogue between the two groups.*

*In this task, a contrast was obvious between our Latin American friends working with harsh and dangerous struggles around basic human needs and Westerners working with struggles around morale and spirit and repressive tolerance. While the latter may seem more luxurious and “merely psychological” and the struggles of Latin America more life and death – in a way, it seemed to me,*

*that cracking the puzzle of human services' professionals defensiveness and emotional reactions, is the same puzzle of the Western world's silences and defensiveness and implication in the damaging of the earth and other peoples via economic globalization.*

*These struggles therefore seem connected and comparable while different in form. And in each, the struggle involves coming together and recognizing and critically knowing both self and other, before being freed to move for transformation of self and other, for each. The remaining question is, as always, why and how can the powerful change, and how can the dolientes speed this.*

Source : e-mail dated 2 June 1997 issued from the Congress Communications Centre.

## **REFLECTION (5)**

### **A Visit to Henequen - Colin Fletcher (England) and Leon White (Australia)**

*When is a village not a village? Answer: When it is shacks and tracks on top of a rubbish tip built by the people themselves as they sorted the garbage to make money from recycling. Now, after 35 years of stench, disease, malnutrition and ostracism, they learn that their village is "high risk," not to get any services, and in the path of a planned highway.*

*Henequen began on the edge of Cartagena. It was a series of steep valleys with poor vegetation. Carts drawn by donkeys brought rubbish out: cardboard and cans, damaged goods and plastic.*

*The people, known as the "disosables," began to arrive and scrape an existence from hand-sorting the waste of others.*

*There is now an elementary school and a small primary health centre. Water is brought by tanker – making washing a luxury. Organised in two 12-hour shifts, 200 workers sort continuously. Those who work at night have become expert at sorting by hand.*

*We arrived to be greeted by an Austrian nun in the church. Outside, the children were waiting to dance. All were clean, bright eyed and curious. We heard from village leaders that they wanted*

*us to see that they had decent houses and were not living like animals. They said concessionaires were creaming off the cash from their recycling and so keeping them poor. They have been told by the government to get out in ten days time, and they wanted our support.*

*After the three air conditioned buses pulled away, we felt and thought of our privilege and responsibilities now as learners of this story. We were asked for support in opposition to the destruction of the village as the price of a freeway.*

*We are left now honoured to have been welcomed, honoured to be asked for support. Will our action now keep this honour sacred? Or will our inaction portray our unworthiness of this sacred trust? We owe much to all who helped us share this trust.*

Source : e-mail dated 6 June 1997 issued from the Congress Communications Centre

## **REFLECTION 6**

### **Concluding Summary**

#### **Making Sense of Convergence: The North Star of Altruism**

##### **Orlando Fals Borda**

*As you could probably feel at the Final Panel just held, the main themes of our Participatory Convergence Congress have criss-crossed during this week in many ways. They have given rise to infinite questions related to theory-making, process management, systems thinking, the educational challenge, and philosophical, socio-economic and political problems. There have been lots of stimulating ideas, but never claiming what Percy Bysshe Shelley called the "divine right of intellectuals", especially poets, to be "the unacknowledged legislators of the world".*

*We have not been so arrogant but have exercised a certain healthy pique produced by our desire to exorcize, through participation, the sin of imposing our own ideas and practices on unsuspecting common peoples. Rather we have tried to respect and learn from*

*popular knowledge, and we have repeated this experience these days right here.*

*In my own view, this complementarity of academic and popular knowledge has been one main tangible result of our discussions during this week on ethics and fieldwork; on systemic practice; on local government and political and cultural movements; on the global challenge; on industry and human economics; on action learning and creative teaching; on justice and peace; on the counterdiscourse of development; on possibilities for participant micro and macro work; on environmentalism; on hunger and poverty; and on the intricacies of creativity and communication.*

*We have received good lessons and warnings from President fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brasil and political leaders, historians of movements and promoters of networks, from literary figures, engineers, sociologists, economists, entrepreneurs and, last but not least, from our late friend Paulo Freire. Most of them tended to set limits to rampant postmodernism and neoliberalism.*

*Yet I also feel that, beyond ideas and arts, the driving force of this event has been action, that is, our overall concern with the practical and with what to do in our respective environments. We want to proceed and do our work more thoroughly, although with the bearings of a theory enriched with concrete pertinence, and with the supports of a personal commitment reinforced by ethics. This has been rather clear to me also at the Final Panel. It would also clarify the relations between the intellectual and the politician, and between the academy and the real world.*

*As you know, in sociological tradition there have been many studies of social change and social dynamics, but not so many analyses of action mechanisms themselves, like the cause-and-effect linkages determined by recent chaos theory, as recalled by Wallerstein. W.I. Thomas in the 1930's had contributed in this specific direction with his concept of "definition of the situation step by step". His empirical stance was useful, but it turned out insufficient. Jaspers then complemented it with a vision of history based on a "hermeneutical situation", meaning the situation in which we find ourselves with regard to the tradition or heritage that we are trying to transform. Hence the contemporary, applied*

*hermeneutics about which we have learned so much from Agnes Heller.*

*Now as we depart for home, I find it helpful to suggest grounding our future work on Jasper's and Heller's lead about applied hermeneutics, and on Wallerstein's grand vision of the SpaceTime theory as we heard it this week. In this way we could choose better on what we want to do, and improve on our praxis within well-specified contexts.*

*Gadamer also helps us along this useful path by pointing at three relevant elements: 1) The "life experience" as such, which includes not one step (understanding) but three steps, with the addition of interpretation and application (remember that for him application was not blind technology or simple expertise but political reason); 2) "Practical acuteness or wisdom" which was how Gadamer interpreted Aristotle's ethical concept of phronesis; and 3) the "fusion of horizons" as a way to discover angles beyond the near to improve actual conditions, a method to focus better the fringes between disciplines. Certainly this looks to me like an appropriate formulation to overcome scientific, political, and technical shortsightedness as well as institutional staleness, especially if we want to talk about new scientific paradigms.*

*If we could make praxis, phronesis and ethos converge and place this combination on a fusion of horizons perspective, we might also gain two other benefits: 1) We could be more sure, persistent, and effective in our work as it becomes clear that the purpose of our knowledge as a fluid phenomenon is to guide and to govern better our daily action; and 2) We could also move toward the construction of paradigms that would be practically, intellectually as well as morally satisfying. I would think Professors Goulet and Lincoln would agree on this point. Goulet accepts that our new paradigm may be achieving a critical mass. And Lincoln specifies criteria for this difficult task. All of which takes us somewhat beyond Thomas Kuhn.*

*Of course this task of paradigm building calls for a quest for creativity so that we can select relevant topics of inquiry and ground them as pertinent subjects of research and action, hopefully without fear of violence or threats from vested interests as has often*

*happened. Here is where imagination as well as courage come into play in science-making: we need them urgently in some holistic measure to overcome our present frustration and partial paralysis in the face of such acute world problems. We need courage and imagination in order to become effective builders and defenders of ethnogenetic civilizations and cultures (as De Roux invited us to do in our opening session), to stop the self-destructive rituals of exploitative dominant systems. We have protested here and on the street this week in a very eloquent manner. So we need to turn our eyes again to the North Star of altruism, and to concede to altruism all its subversive potential in today's decomposed world.*

*In this rather grandiose manner, to make the instrumental converge with the axiological—to combine a clear head with a lion heart—appears like a worthwhile effort to redefine and reconnect our disciplines and arts, and to recapture the positive essence and meaning of our scientific and practical concerns.*

*We are now more assured than before by this week's speakers that there is an immanent validity of critical methodology in the sciences, both "hard" and "soft", that there is only one logic of scientific investigation. But we require more than a unifying method, we require also to entwine it with real experience, Erfahrung, or vivencia. The many schools of participatory research which met here to clarify how they differ and concur (with predominance of the immanent convergences just mentioned) appear to be the closest to that ideal of science and service that we tried to*

*articulate here at this event. Even with obstacles and ups and downs, our participatory schools are demonstrating in tandem a valid field method and a satisfactory philosophy of life. This is quite an achievement. Thanks to you for this great proof of pertinence and effectiveness, which answers in part the two questions on scientific method and political project made to this Congress by President Cardoso.*

*Hence the importance of continuing to work with this intelligent, soul-filling flexibility as well as with seriousness of purpose, if we want to reconstruct our institutions, our lives, and our relationship with nature.*

*Of course, to give meaning to imperilled institutions and damaged lives, we will have to discard some things and to refashion others according to our renovated fusion of horizons. This process of revamping is nothing new in the history of humanity. It may be painful like Sisyphus' ordeal, but at present we would not feel under any insurmountable curse to do and to undo as happened to him in mythological times. Apparently we still can survive as humans and manage our own man-made disasters.*

*As new horizons rise in the near future within transformational TimeSpace, other hopes and possibilities appear. It is likely that our age will keep on giving us some additional space and some remade time for our convergent knowledge to acquire significance, and thus save us from anomie and greater stress and frustration.*

*Therefore I invite you finally to take advantage of this dynamic, historical leeway for hope. May we go home now, even more able to keep on planting everywhere some of the good seeds of social reconstruction that were sown amongst us during this week.*

*Goodbye and good luck to all of you. Our Participatory Convergence Congress is adjourned, see you again in the year 2000.*

Source: Orlando Fals Borda, 1998, pp.233-236.

## Projects

In “projects”, we provide reports of work-in-progress or information about completed projects. There are many ways to use action learning and action research and many different disciplines and locations in which a project can be pursued. We are inviting people to provide reports so that we can all become aware of the wide variety of options available to us.

### **ction research and the performing arts**

This project description was received from Dr. Sallyann Goodall, Head of the Music Department at the University of Durban-Westville, South Africa.

“Since mid-1997, I’ve run an action research project to help in-service teachers up-grade their music teaching skills, funded by the Swedish International Development Agency. It’s called UDW Music Education Action Research Project, serving primarily disadvantaged African teachers at the moment. We’ve just had our funding renewed.

Generally we’re thrilled at the results obtained with this method in a rather short time. South African universities are experiencing severe cutbacks from the State at the same time that they’re transforming [as well as seeking to address equity of access, ie. serve more people than before] ; and so we’re in the grip of a many-tentacled demoralisation at the moment. Because action research has been effective for our group of school teachers in music, and because my department has a high level of discussion, shared goals and participation, I would like to see if it would be possible to run my whole academic department (8 lecturers) as an action research project.

I would like to correspond with anyone:

1. In any field actually doing this in an academic department of a tertiary institution
2. Working in action research and music
3. Exploring the development of music curriculum – especially intercultural – through action research
4. Working in developing teaching skills of educationally-disadvantaged people – preferably in developing countries
5. Who would like to collaborate with us on the task of, or the funding of, running the whole of an academic department of a tertiary institution as an action research project
6. With experience of staff development projects among performing arts lecturers/faculty, and has thoughts on how this could be done by action research methods
7. Who has experience of developing/promoting the performing arts field in communities via action research methods
8. Who has thoughts on the field of psychology (especially with regard to evaluation and to community work) in relation to action research
9. Who has any ideas on how communities can get income-producing projects in performing arts off the ground – by any methods whatsoever, or
10. Who has money to give to any of the above ideas.”

**Contact details:**

Dr. Sallyann Goodall, Head of the Music Department  
University of Durban-Westville P/Bag X54001  
4000 Durban, South Africa

Fax: 27-31-2044679 Email: sgoodall@pixie.udw.ac.za

## Noticeboard

In "Noticeboard" we bring you information about impending activities or resources, such as conferences, courses and journals. We welcome member contributions to "Noticeboard".

### **Solutions Outside the Square ALARPM National Conference 12 - 13 July 1998**

*The significant problems that we face today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking that created them. (Albert Einstein)*

To move to a different level of thinking we need to find ... solutions outside the square. This conference seeks to address questions or issues such as:

- when and where are solutions outside the square required?
- how do we create these solutions individually and with others?
- how do we action these solutions to improve our lives, workplaces and communities?
- how do we evaluate and learn from solutions outside the square?

#### **WHERE AND WHEN?**

12-13 July Brisbane Queensland  
Bardon Conference Centre  
390 Simpsons Road, Bardon, Brisbane

## PRACTITIONERS AND PROCESSES

Deborah Lange, Deborah Lange & Associates, "Is it Solutions We Need or Better Understanding? Exploring problems from multiple perspectives."

Philip Booth, Griffith University "An Unforgettable Experience of Designing Your First Learnscape." An outdoor activity on learnscaping

Paul Inglis, QUT "Processing the Future Through Action Research, Process Management & Futures Studies."

Kate Andrews & Judy Matthews, QUT "Ways of Framing Problems, Ways of Solving Problems" Interactive workshop

Elizabeth Synnott, Macquarie House "A systemic approach to thinking outside the square using sociodrama."

Shankariah Chamala & Phd Students "Paradigm Shifts to Participatory Action Research Methodology"

Helen Bryce "When a Square Becomes a Cube: problem based learning & integration of action research in community settings"

Kay Dickie & Frances Harvey "Solutions through shifting perspectives outside the square." Experiential workshop - sound, artwork, reverie.

Paul Wildman, IMC & Bob Dick, Griffith/SCU "Deep Action Learning" - Debate

Merv Wilkinson, QUT "Consulting in Organisations: transforming organisational assumptions through process-oriented consultations"

Phil Crane, QUT "Incorporating Action Research into Youth Homeless Taskforces"

Peter Howie, Mac. Hse "Human relational paradigms, constructs and frameworks using sociodrama and concretisation" Exploration.

Stewart Arnold, Change Focus "Performance Feedback: getting the right answers means asking the right questions"

Geof Hill, Mottram, Hill & Assoc. "Searching for Signs of Congruent Practice in a Post Positivist Higher Degree World" A sociodrama

Joan Braithwaite, Otago Polytechnic NZ "A process to create a bi-cultural therapeutic community for offenders"

Rachel Parmee, Otago P/technic Dunedin NZ "Living & Working With Asthma: a dynamic interplay" A play within a play

Stewart Hase & Alan Davis "The Johari Window and the Dark Side of Organisations" An experiential process of discovery (SCU, Lismore)

Liane Anderson (Tasmania) "Tapping the Well of Inner Knowledge: What Square?" Experiential exercises to break out of the squares that constrain us.

Martin Grimmer (University of Tasmania) "Managing the Process of Mid-Life Crisis: Learning from Career Change" - a participative session with reflections on participant's past experiences.

## **SYNOPSIS**

Synopses of the workshop sessions are available from the ALARPM office and can be found on the internet:

<http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/sawd/ari/alarpm.html>

## **ALARPM AGM**

The AGM will be held on Sunday evening from 5.30 - 6.30 pm. All are welcome to attend although only financial members may vote. Drinks and nibbles will be served.

## **Creative Systems Practice**

### **4th ANZSYS Conference 7 -10 October 1998**

This conference has been designed so that creative systems practitioners can share and discuss their ideas. The dynamics are strategically interactive, inclusive and generative. It is a focussed environment for training providers, researchers, community leaders and organisation managers, industrialists, environmentalists and educators who are concerned with the systemic development of their workplace. As such this conference is multi-disciplinary in nature. Its emphasis is on the creative use of systems thinking and practices, in its many guises, as frameworks for managing multi disciplinary content in the learning processes of design and change management. It will bring together practitioners, researchers, and educators from various fields of endeavour including:

- Industrial Design,
- Environmental Management,
- Farming, Agribusiness and Extension,
- Rural and Community Development,
- Organisational Change and
- Education.
  
- Throughout the conference delegates will be engaged in a process that has been designed to facilitate a sharing of knowledge across these disparate and rarely connected domains of action. In doing this the conference will explore how complex issues are being addressed and how creative approaches are developing especially where systems practitioners draw on such ideas as:
  
- The Psychology of Systems Thinking

- Soft Systems Approaches
- Chaos and Complexity
- Systems Dynamics
- Systems Engineering
- Systemic Action Research
- Information Technology
- Learning Organisations
- Systemic Curriculum and Implementation
- Industry and Community Leadership
- Innovations in Complex Problem Solving
- Community Driven Economic Management and
- Industry Extension and Development

In engaging with these fields of knowledge the idea is to generate opportunities for the sharing of approaches and identify opportunities for developing new approaches for managing difficult situations. Approaches that simultaneously find the points of greatest leverage on the system in focus while having minimal detrimental effects on other people, organisations and the environment in which the system is embedded. The conference will also include a facilitated systemic futures workshop to help all participants to explore the future of their domains of action and the role of systems thinking and practices within these domains.

In this context the key purposes of the conference are:

- To make systems thinking principles and methods accessible to a wide audience
- To provide examples of the creative use of systems thinking in real situations

- To project scenarios of the future within each domain of action and to identify emerging needs for systems practitioners and researchers within these possible futures.

**CONFERENCE LANGUAGE**      English

**VENUE**      UWS- Hawkesbury  
Richmond, NSW  
Australia

### **WHO SHOULD ATTEND?**

Anyone involved in systems delivery and change projects. These conferences usually attract practitioners and academics from a wide range of disciplines including Organisational Transition, Strategic Planning, Problem Solving, Systems Design, Project and Operations Management, Farming Systems Research and Extension, Community Leaders, Development Facilitators, Organisational Managers, Industrialists and Environmentalists. In the end people who are concerned with creating change and managing within the complexity of social, environmental and economic dynamics. The emphasis on delivery and implementation will ensure a bias towards practical systems thinking.

### **CONFERENCE FORMAT**

**DAY 1:**      Registration and a social event during the evening of 7<sup>th</sup> Oct

**DAY 2 & 3:** A series of keynote speakers and paper sessions with facilitated critical discussion sessions strategically placed to open up the field of Creative Systems Practice.

**DAY 4:** Global scenario setting, conference review and a “Systems Scenario Workshop” to explore the future of systems practices in each field of endeavour.

### **CALL FOR PAPERS**

All papers addressing the practical application of systems thinking will be considered. Please send (or email) an abstract of approximately 200 - 400 words summarising your proposed presentation to the address below.

### **KEY DATES**

Deadline for abstracts                      May 29, 1998

Papers    July 31 1998

### **The Organising Team**

ANZSys Conference 1998

c/- Hawkesbury Technologies Ltd

UWS-Hawkesbury

PO Box 415

Richmond NSW 2753

Fax:        61-2-4570 1750

Enquiries phone Alison Frost on: 61-2-4570 1690

## The bookshelf

### **Peoples' Participation: Challenges Ahead** Compiled and analyzed by Orlando Fals Borda

This book tries to collect and synthesize the most outstanding expressions of the World Congresses 4/8 on Action Research, Action Learning and Process Management held at the Convention Center and the Convent of St. Francis at Cartagena de Indias, Colombia from May 31 to June 5, 1997. The theme of the Congress, which was attended by 1850 people from 61 countries, was *Participatory Convergence in Knowledge, Space and Time*.

The book aims to stimulate a wider discussion of the issues raised at the Congress and is divided into four parts:

Part I - The Formal Opening

Part II - Underpinnings

Part III - Theoretical and Practical Experiences

Part IV - The Future of Participatory Convergence

Part I recalls important moments at the formal inaugural session, including comments on the First World Symposium of 1977, an exhortation for peace, a tribute to our pioneers, pertinent declarations of official policies, plus an extraordinary personal and political statement by President Carlos of Brazil.

Part II includes the lectures on topics of general concern to participatory audiences which were presented at afternoon plenaries during the Congress. They are Immanuel Wallerstein's theory of SpaceTime; Manfred Max Neef's critique of classic economics and neoliberalism; Agnes

Heller's conceptualization of modernity, ethics, and democracy; Rajesh Tandon's personal reflections on construction of knowledge, which have ample implications; Robert Chambers' methodological descriptions of rural change practice and diagnosis; and Robert Flood's discussion of systems theory and participatory research.

Part III provides Orlando Fals Borda's summary and comments on significant points raised in general presentations and group discussions. Orlando provides a review of the "state of the art" of participatory research by commenting on theoretical issues, definitional problems, methodologies, and the practical implications for schools, companies and "geopolitical timespace".

Part IV covers the reflections of the final panel which included Marja Liisa Swantz, Immanuel Wallerstein, Agnes Heller, Yvonna S. Lincoln, and Denis Goulet. It also provides the final summary and farewell by Orlando Fals Borda, Coordinator of the Congress.

The book is available from:

In our next issue of the ALAR Journal, you will find articles on...

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Project reports, new books and more...

# Guidelines for contributors

## Contributions to this journal

Through the ALAR Journal, we aim to promote the study and practice of action learning and action research and to develop personal networking on a global basis.

We welcome contributions in the form of:

- articles (up to 10 A4 pages, double spaced)
- letters to the editor
- profiles of people (including yourself) engaged in action research or action learning
- project descriptions, including work in progress (maximum 1000 words)
- information about a local action research/ action learning network
- items of interest (including conferences, seminars and new publications)
- book reviews
- report on a study or research trip
- comments on previous contributions

You are invited to base your writing style and approach on the material in this copy of the journal, and to keep all contributions brief. The journal is not a refereed publication, though submissions are subject to editorial review.

## Contributed case study monographs

Contributions are welcomed to the Action Research Case Study (ARCS) monograph series. The case studies in this refereed series contribute to a theoretical and practical understanding of action research and action learning in applied settings. Typical length is in the range 8,000 to 12,000 words: about 40 typed A4 pages, double spaced.

Types of case studies include (but are not limited to):

- completed cases, successful and unsuccessful
- partial successes and failures
- work in progress
- within a single monograph, multiple case studies which illustrate important issues
- problematic issues in current cases

We are keen to develop a review and refereeing process which maintains quality. At the same time we wish to avoid the adversarial relationship that often occurs between intending contributors and referees. Our plan is for a series where contributors, editors, and referees enter into a collaborative process of mutual education.

We strongly encourage dual or multiple authorship. This may involve a combination of experienced and inexperienced practitioners, theoreticians, clients, and authors from different sectors or disciplines. Joint authors who disagree about some theoretical or practical point are urged to disclose their differences in their report. We would be pleased to see informed debate within a report.

You may have interesting case material but may be uncertain of its theoretical underpinnings. If so, approach us. We may

offer joint authorship with an experienced collaborator to assist with the reflective phase of the report.

Another option is to submit a project report initially for the ALAR Journal (1000 words) with a view to developing the report into a full case study.

Detailed guidelines for case studies are available from the editor, ALAR Journal. The first case study in the series, by Vikki Uhlmann, is about the use of action research to develop a community consultation protocol.

The cost of *Consulting on a consultation protocol* is listed in the following Catalogue order form.

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