

Design

Inventing an exercise, designing a workshop, planning a learning event or an organisation development laboratory: all of these are based on the principle that the constructed situation acts as an image of a real-life situation. Within that image, people can explore, both what goes on and what new possibilities there are.

In designing a learning event, we have to consider two dimensions. One dimension is about goals and needs. The other dimension is about outer and inner.

A simple exercise may just come off the cuff, and work within its context. Some of the simple theatre and performance exercises listed in the previous section came out of the situation one was in.

But for any more complex event we have to consider both of these dimensions: goals and needs; and outer and inner.

Goals are conscious, recognised, intentionally put forward as learning objectives. They may be well-articulated, or they may need to be worked on. They can be asked for or developed in advance; or they can be written up on a screen or chart at the start of a learning event - or both.

Needs may often not be consciously recognised. A need may be for some situation or circumstance or interaction. Or it may be defensive. If needs are defensive this does not necessarily mean they have to be exposed. A good designer, a good facilitator, will often be aware of something but not just bring it out. Strategy is always needed.

And as to the other dimension, there are two landscapes, outer and inner. There is the outer organism, the team, the family, the organisation, or whatever section of the social environment is the context for this learning event; and there is the inner organism, within the individual, which also can be explored, indeed may inevitably come to be explored, though there may be resistance to doing so. (Well, there may be resistance to exploration or change in the outer organism also of course).

And the outer and inner often reflect each other, there are parallels between them. Indeed, they can be assumed to reflect each other, though this connection is not always clear. (And again, there may well be obstructions to seeing it or working with it).

In designing a learning event, we have to consider goals, and we have to consider needs. Anyone who sets out to design an event has to consider both.

And those who design an event for others must consider their own goals and needs. At design meetings at the Poly we had a strict format to consider these first. I strongly recommend anyone who aspires to set up, design or facilitate a learning event to follow this agenda.

I did not expect, when I set out to write this section, that I would embrace the whole range of 'exercises', from the simplest performance exercise such as relating to an object to the complex learning laboratory which has the aim of providing a situation where people will experience the joys and the difficulties of the organisation. (And for me, it is the co-operative organisation that is the most significant). But thinking out how to present this, and what it signifies in terms of learning, this is what took shape.

There is a unified pattern to approaching all these situations - which makes sense. Although of course each situation, each event, has its own unique issues and shape.

And there is a connection and similarity between the design in advance of an event and the awareness that a facilitator, leader, therapist, initiator needs to retain in a part of their own consciousness during the event. Ideally, this awareness will grow in every participant, especially in a co-operative situation.

I remember what a German participant at a peace camp I once attended said (I always think of it in a German accent! - there was a time when the German movements, Peace and Green and Anti-nuclear, were especially articulate and developed): 'We are all leaders here.'

So any design towards co-operation or collective decision-making needs to progress along the road of every person in a collective social organism being able to take initiatives, consider and develop the initiatives of others, and follow them also.

So a word about politics.

Politics

In our nation, we could say in our world, there is a yawning chasm between the free market on one edge and centralist control on the other.

No position or structure has yet been clearly articulated in this gap. I believe we need structures which lead towards localised co-operatives.

There is already literature around, that 'happiness' does not depend on ever-increasing wealth. There is already literature around that sustainability can, indeed needs to, replace perpetual growth. But this does not seem to have been brought, in any significant or effective way, into public discourse.

I believe that the Greens are closest to it. They want to move towards localised economies. They want to reverse the effects of globalisation and the alliance between transnational corporations and governments which seems to constantly reinforce and protect this.

An important book from the Green position that does go in some detail into the mechanisms and structures not only to protect the natural environment but to structure the social environment is Green Alternatives To Globalisation, A Manifesto, by Michael Woodlin (who has since sadly died) and Caroline Lucas (who has since become our one Green MP) - remarkably, this was written before the 2007 financial crisis and pretty much predicted it. A more recent book is Prosperity Without Growth: Economics For A Finite Planet by Tim Jackson. It has been well received, but I find it disappointing. In terms of social structuring it does not seem to me to present much that is new.

In any case, however much the Greens may claim to embrace the importance of social structuring it is not really prominent in their publicly proclaimed programme. I believe they need to articulate more clearly their position, to broaden it explicitly from the natural environment to include the social environment.

I think everyone, they as well as Labour, and leftish parties in other countries, have a fear of 'educating' the public in these ideas. And perhaps they simply do not know what structures could move things in that direction.

I am not, and never have been, a Marxist activist. But the analysis relating to ownership and control of resources remains valid. And of course 'the collective' became a dirty word (for sure with good reason) under communism.

Meanwhile, the fear of 'too much government' is fostered. So the bloated rhetoric of the 'Big Society', proclaimed by our current cabinet two thirds of whom are millionaires, continues.

Useful sources of information:

In the section on Structure I mentioned Ricardo Semler's book *Maverick* describing how he reorganised the company Semco in Brazil, which he inherited. This is a must-read.

Here follows a list of Co-operative organisations. It is not always easy to find information on collective structures.

Mondragon Corporation, Basque Country, Spain.

Alvarado Street Bakery, a worker-owned bakery in Petaluma, California, part of a wider organisation called Red Clover Worker's Brigade.

Footprint Workers Co-op - a workers co-operative ecologically-minded printers based in Leeds, UK.

Radical Routes, a network of co-ops also based in Leeds.

Co-operatives UK, which provides a directory of co-operatives all over the UK.

Greencity Wholefoods, Glasgow.

Kibbutz Kramim, a green co-op in the Negev desert, Israel.

Boimondeau, a co-operative in France, established by the Resistance at the end of WW2, which now is reported as having reverted to a capitalistic structure

The Ownership Commission, UK. This states as one of its aims 'greater engagement of employees and shareholders', while advocating 'decent capitalism'.

By contrast, the Occupy movement and Seeds For Change advocate a consensus decision-making model which many (myself included) would consider unrealistic in the absence of a huge amount of preparatory work in organisational relating.

The co-operative movement has actually developed a lot world-wide. Here are some direct links: < www.uk.coop/ > < www.co-op.ac.uk >

< www.co-op-party.org.uk > < <http://uwcc.wisc.edu/info/intl/chloupkova.pdf> > and there is a set-up here in UK, the New Economics Foundation, who have a mass of material, with, in my view, the right political and ecological orientation: < www.neweconomics.org >)

The courses and workshops and learning events I have described in various parts of this website, some of them from decades ago, remain, in my view, of great relevance to the predicament we find ourselves in, we as a national and global entity, today.

Experience

An issue remains. Setting up a structure is not enough. People need experience. In our society, in our education, we have very little, in many spheres it could be said no experience at all, of relating co-operatively. To move along this road needs a consideration of how to establish situations, from childhood onwards, in schools and further education and teams and organisations commercial and other, situations within which people can experience a co-operative way of interacting.

This is not the prevailing practice or tradition in our society. How that could develop and evolve is a big question! Perhaps evolve is the operative word. If our evolution as a species can't move that way, our very existence seems at threat.