

# A Psychosynthesis of Organizational Behaviour

## Introduction

The term 'psychosynthesis' is drawn from the work of Robert Assagioli, an Italian psychotherapist, who has devoted a lifetime to helping individuals develop coherent, organized and unified personalities. My intention here is to extend, insofar as is possible, psychological theories of the individual developed by Carl Rogers and Robert Assagioli most specifically, and generated by the 'Third Force' of humanistic psychologists more generally, into the psychology of organizations. Whereas the behavioural psychologist takes a reductionist view of human behaviour, focusing on conditioned responses to external stimuli and whereas the orthodox psycho-analyst works through analysis rather than synthesis, the 'Third Force', as indicated by such terms as psychosynthesis and gestalt therapy, has concentrated on the whole person. As a result Erwin Lazlo, the contemporary apostle of systems philosophy, has recently written:

*'The insights of humanistic psychology into the dynamics of integrated processes in man could be placed in the context of systems philosophy's conception of nature as a realm of complex dynamic systems.'*

Similarly, in my view: *'The insights of humanistic psychology into the dynamics of integrated processes in man could be placed in the context of organizations as complex dynamic systems.'*

I shall be utilizing an overall systems framework incorporating inputs, transformation processes and outputs as well as objectives and environment. Moreover, throughout this analysis, I shall be transplanting theories about the individual into the corporate context.

## Organizational Analysis

### 1. Objectives

Practical psychosynthesis involves the construction of an integrated organization, wherein physical, monetary and human resource potential is fully utilized, developed and co-ordinated to the extent that the organization and the people within are continuously engaged in a self-actualizing process. The organization, moreover, does not aim towards a specific product or end point; rather, it is a persistent state of flux or becoming, creating a direction rather than arriving at a destination. Finally, the people within the organization should follow the course of action: *'which is the most*

*economical vector in relationship to all the internal and external stimuli, because it is that behaviour which will be most deeply satisfying'.*

Rogers is implying in fact, that the most 'economical' allocation of resources is the one which minimizes the dissipation of energy or maximizes the utilization of potential of organizational members through the greatest satisfaction of their needs. The process of satisfying needs, as an overall organizational objective, can in fact be equated with the process of conserving or replenishing energy in the physical world. The fulfilment of needs and the realization of potential are merely two sides of the same coin.

## **2. Inputs**

Within conventional organizations physical and human resources are valued at a given purchase price. Costs of materials, buildings, equipment and personnel are entered into the organization's expense account, while the actual monetary value of real estate and machinery is entered into the balance sheet; the asset value of human resources is in no way systematically taken into account. The important point to mention here, however, is that organizations fail to take account, in any rigorous way, of their resource potential. In fact, as Stafford Beer points out, it is desirable to differentiate between:

- actuality, or at what rate resources are currently valued;
- capacity, or what resources would be worth if they were more efficiently utilized at the current time;
- potentiality, or what resource potential is available if it were to be fully developed.

In terms of its human resources, therefore, the 'psychosynthetic' organization would need to take account of the full range and variety of capacities of its members and their potentialities for feeling, thought and action.

## **3. Outputs**

A survey of the 'Third Force' literature leads me to the conclusion that 'freedom', 'growth' and 'transcendence' are the three all-pervading behavioural outputs most applicable to a systems analysis of organizations. A fully functioning organization should be able to exercise absolute *freedom* in its choice of actions, unconstrained by defense mechanisms, distortions of information or aggressive reactions, but acting purely according to the will of its members, so that it: *'is not a passive receiver of stimuli coming from an external world, but in a very concrete sense creates its universe'*. Von Bertalanffy also points to the primacy of *growth* within general systems philosophy as well as humanistic psychology: *'Life is not comfortable settling down in pre-ordained grooves of being; at its best it is elan vital inexorably driven toward higher forms of existence.'*

Maslow identifies one of the main features of self-actualization as a series of choices whereby growth and progression take precedence over fear or regression. Finally, *transcendence* moves a dimension beyond growth, as exemplified in the words of the historian Lewis Mumford: *'An underlying urge to self-transformation possibly lies at the basis of all existence, finding expression in the process of growth, renewal, development, directed change, perfection. . .'*

An organization that constantly renews and transforms itself is one that transcends immediate objectives towards the realization of ultimate principles, by moving beyond physical and economic ambitions to higher level and more widely embracing societal goals.

#### **4. Environmental Constraints**

The synthetic, integrated, holistic view adopted here leads naturally to the conclusion that organizations must develop a total awareness of their environments. Their actions are therefore influenced or constrained by ecological, technological, economic, political and cultural forces surrounding the organizational system. Furthermore, opportunities arising for freedom, growth and transcendence stem separately and interdependently from all the environmental areas mentioned.

#### **5. Assumptions about Human Nature**

Humanistic psychology sees man as 'proactive', or future seeking rather than as reactively responding to stimuli; he is considered therefore, to be at an early stage in the evolution of his own possibilities. Hadley Cantril has identified a series of human needs that probably reflects the viewpoint of the majority of the 'Third Force'. Human beings, he says, are creatures of hope who continuously seek to enlarge the range and enrich the quality of their satisfactions. They not only have the capacity, moreover, to make choices, but they also have the desire to exercise this capacity so that, if their needs are to be fulfilled, they require the freedom to exercise their choices. Human beings, furthermore, want to experience their own identity and integrity and seek some value or system of beliefs to which they can commit themselves.

#### **6. Process: Management Style**

In the context of organizational psychosynthesis, an appropriate management style arises virtually automatically out of the assumptions about human nature mentioned above. Human beings should be regarded as ends rather than means so that the 'people' side of management gains priority over the task element. Moreover, full regard should be given to subjective feelings and the affective elements of behaviour alongside the more cognitive, task related features. Concern with the higher human qualities of creativity, spontaneity, autonomy, empathy and human openness should become very much part of the manager's sphere of activity. Finally, his viewpoint should extend beyond the immediate boundaries of his organization to the wider environment within which the institution operates, to the natural, economic and social systems surrounding him.

#### **7. Process: Communication**

Carl Rogers, in outlining 'A Therapist's View of the Good Life' identifies, in the process of development, increasing levels of 'openness' to experience, 'existential' living and trust in one's organism.

**Openness:** A full degree of openness, in an organization, involves complete sensitivity to stimuli arising from both within and without the organization, and impinging upon it. For this state to exist, data would need to be freely relayed through the corporate

information system without being blocked or distorted by any personal or institutional defense mechanisms. In effect, Shigeru Kobanashi, Managing Director of Sony Corporation in Japan, abiding by the Buddhist philosophy of 'Mu' representing 'nothingness', has written of Sony:

*Without being hampered by our own and others' fixed ideas, we are to observe honestly both the subjective and objective aspects of conditions as they appear to be at various times, set our goals accordingly, and establish means of achieving these goals in a spirit of complete OPEN-MINDEDNESS.'*

Furthermore, as a corollary to this practice of 'open-mindedness', Sony place heavy emphasis on the spreading of information amongst individuals and groups within the company. Thus they have gone so far as to provide a 'dial 2000' central information service which is accessible to all employees.

Within an atmosphere of openness, therefore, information becomes the means towards the development of an organizational self-awareness, whereby it is able to fully experience what is going on internally and externally, so as to be able to respond effectively. Open self-expression replaces institutional secrecy so that both formal and informal communication is enhanced.

**Existential living:** Following upon openness to experience is the notion of 'existentialism' whereby the organization exists fully in each moment. As a result, organizational structure and dynamics arise out of experience rather than being translated or twisted to fit pre-conceived ideas. Such a situation is again exemplified in the Sony Case:

*'We destroy the static and dehumanizing aspects of traditional organizational patterns.'*

Communication structure, therefore, is not rigidified by formal organization charts and fixed job descriptions; rather, maximum adaptability is facilitated through the derivation of structure from direct experience, not prior to it. The individual, therefore, becomes a participator in and observer of the process of organizational development, rather than being in control of it. The locus and direction of information flows constantly changes, adapting to new situations as they arise. Feedback loops are built into all decision centres so that planning becomes a continuously 'rolling' process.

**Trust:** If an organization is open to experience, the individuals within it are often inclined to do 'what feels right' rather than relying upon guiding policies, rules and procedures. The person who is fully open to experience would have access to all available data on the situation, including his own internal reactions and the uniqueness of the external events and actions.

*'The data would be very complex indeed. But he could permit his total organism, his consciousness participating, to consider each stimulus, need, and demand, its relative intensity and importance, and out of this complex of weighing and balancing, discover that course of action which would come closest to satisfying all his needs. . . The*

*defects which in most of us make this process untrustworthy are the inclusion of information which does not belong to this present situation or the exclusion of information which does.'*

In the final analysis, therefore, the fully functioning organization is able to participate in and with each of its actions and reactions. It makes increasing use of its information sources, structures and processes to perceive, as accurately as is possible, its internal and external situation. To the extent that the organization makes use of all available information, it allows all its members to function freely, amidst all the complexity, in selecting from the multitude of possibilities, that behaviour which at a given moment of time is most generally and genuinely satisfying. It is able to trust its functioning, not because the corporate entity is infallible, but because it can be fully open to the consequences of each of its actions - through appropriate feedback mechanisms - and correct them if they do not conform to expectation.

### **8. Process: Self-Control**

*'Where behaviouristic psychology has taken as its goal the attainment of the ability to describe, to predict and to control objects (animals, human and sub-human), humanistic psychology seeks to so describe men and their experiences that they will be better able to predict and control their own experiences, and thus implicitly to resist the control of others.'*

This statement obviously has profound implications for the authority structure and control of organizations. It implies, by definition, highly participative forms of decision-making at all levels so that authority is in no sense arbitrary and status has to be earned rather than acquired. In many ways, the fluid and reciprocal structure of control inherent in the Yugoslav self-managed enterprise conforms to the above pattern. Whereas, within Yugoslav economic institutions, administrative authority accords with expertise, the ultimate control of the destiny of the enterprise is in the hands of the members as a whole, subject though to national political constraints. The structure of a representative organization is outlined in Figure 1 and the division between governing and administrative authority is reflected in Figure 2.

The dynamics, as opposed to the structure, of self-control or self-management is comprehensively described in Assagioli's development of 'Dynamic Psychology and Psychosynthesis'. Translating his analysis into organizational terms, we emerge with the following four stages in the realization of authentic enterprise self-management and control:

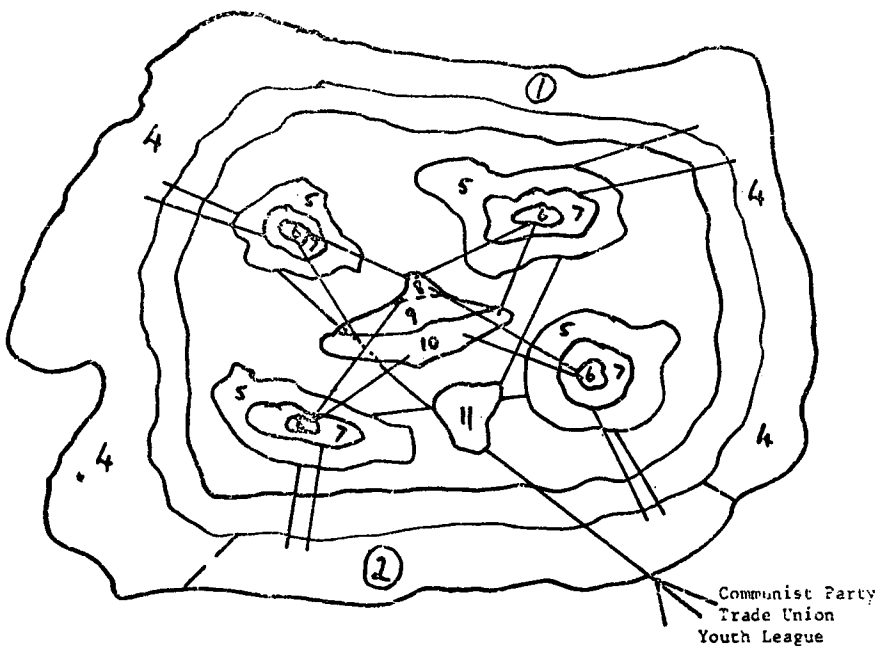
1. Thorough knowledge of the 'corporate culture' or organizational personality.
2. Control of its various elements.
3. Realization of its true aims and objectives, congruent with its 'personality'.
4. Psychosynthesis: the formation or reconstruction of the organization around the new-found centre.

**8. 1 Self-Knowledge** E. Wight Bakke, in his 'Concept of the Social Organization', emphasizes the need for an 'Organizational Charter' that identifies the unique wholeness of a given corporate entity:

*'The Organizational Charter facilitates the relation of people and other organizations to a specific organization in the same way that the concept of Personality or Character facilitates the relation of individual people to each other.'*

The Charter incorporates the name of the organization and the products and/or services it creates, together with its aims and objectives, policies, rules and procedures. In order to really know itself therefore, the organization would need to identify explicitly the features outlined above and also explore many of the implicit value systems, attitudes and beliefs that form the internal reality behind the external activities and expressions of intent. Financial, social, departmental, organization and overall internal audits all go some way towards the cultivation of thoroughgoing self-awareness.

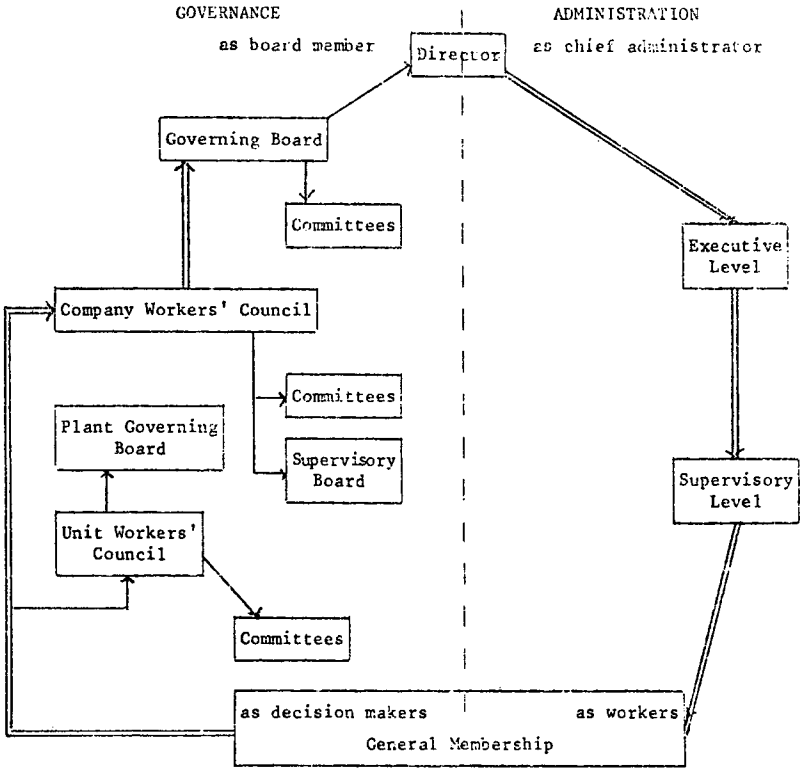
Figure 1: Organization Chart



Key

- 1 The collective membership of the whole company
- 2 The company Workers' Council
- 3 The overall Governing Board
- 4 Committees and other consulting groups of the Worker's Council
- 5 Unit (e.g. plant) Workers' Council
- 6 Unit Directorate
- 7 Unit Governing Board
- 8 Company Director
- 9 Collegium
- 10 Extended Collegium
- 11 Political Aktive

Figure 2: Flow of Authority and Character of Responsibility



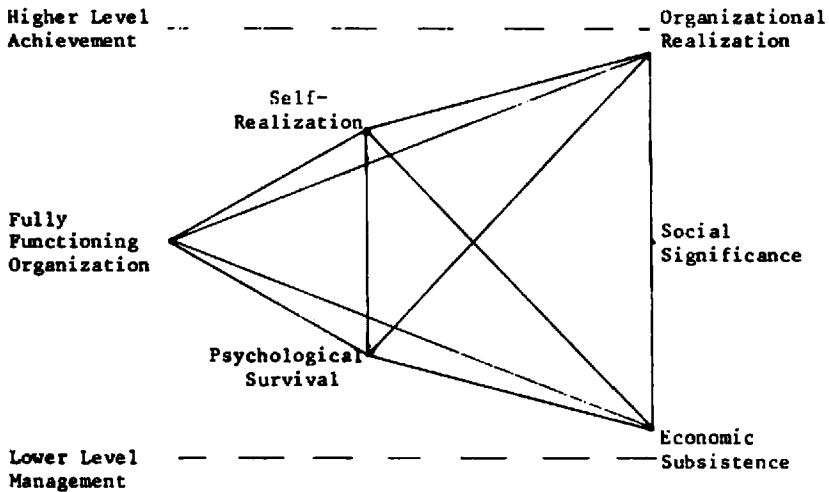
**8. 2 Control** *'We are dominated by everything with which our self becomes identified. We can dominate and control everything from which we dis-identify ourselves.'*

Once an organization has identified the nature of its unique wholeness and the features characterizing its personality, it needs to take possession and acquire control over

them. The most effective way of achieving this, according to Assagioli, is one of 'dis-identification'. For example, the managing director of a commercial concern, rather than bemoaning the fact that 'we are losing money' should be declaring that 'certain forces are acting against the company so as to render it temporarily unprofitable'. In this way, rather than becoming dominated by the situation, the organization assumes control by setting up a confrontation between itself, in a monitoring capacity, and the situation it is facing. The objective monitor, then, is not only in a position to tackle a problem and determine its immediate causes, but, in the longer term, is able, given access to relevant information, to unravel deep-seated causes and cut away the basic roots behind difficulties. This procedure may be divided into two phases: objectification and discrimination, and utilization and control of the energies thus set free.

**8. 3 Realization** The realization of an organization's true capacities is directly linked to the freeing of the potential of individual members. This relationship is outlined in Figure 3 adapted from J.G. Bennett's analysis of organismic potential or significance.

Figure 3: Organizational Potential



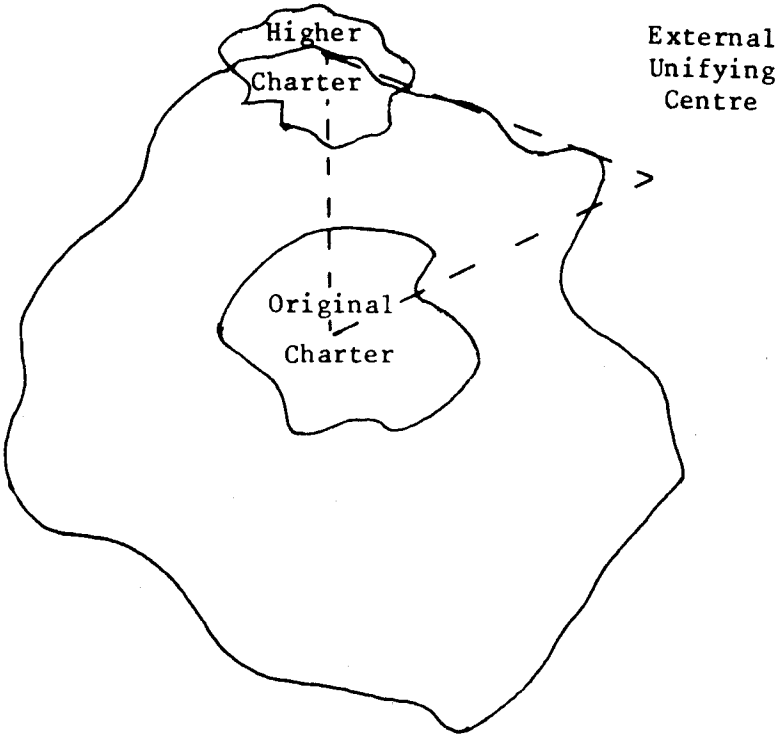
To the extent that individuals become aware and are able to exercise their own capacities, through facilitating tasks, communication processes and reward systems, so organizational potential is liable to be enhanced. Whereas physiological survival and economic subsistence are mere preconditions for survival, a full realization of potential

involves the outputs of freedom, growth and transcendence that have been mentioned, and the processes of openness, existentialism and trust outlined above.



The organization, therefore, must find itself a unifying centre or set of basic aims and objectives around which a fully functioning organization may be built. The evolution of such a centre should automatically follow from thorough self-knowledge of the organization in relation to its environment and from a subsequent objectification and dis-identification process. Finally, the relationship between an organization's original charter, the external unifying centre representing an objectification of the authentic corporate focus, and a higher level charter symbolizing higher level achievement is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Realization



*Assagioli divides practical psychosynthesis, the construction of a new personality, into three principal parts.*

(a) UTILIZATION of available energies, released, in the first instance, through a greater awareness of capacities already existing and, secondly, through the development of revealed potential.

*'Just as heat is changed into motion and electric energy, and vice versa, our emotions and impulses are transformed into physical actions or into imaginative and intellectual activities. Conversely, ideas stir up emotions or are transformed into plans and hence into actions.'*

(b) DEVELOPMENT of the aspects of the organizational personality or charter which are either deficient or inadequate in terms of expectations. This development may be achieved either through training programmes oriented towards the individual or else through changes in the reward systems that affect individual motivation.

(c) CO-ORDINATION of the various organizational resources in new ways so as to develop greater efficiency and effectiveness. Whereas development is oriented towards enhancing the performance of individual resources, co-ordination affects the overall allocation of resources through enhancing their mutual interaction.

### Conclusion

A psychosynthesis of organizational behaviour provides, on the one hand, a holistic, systems approach to organizational analysis, and, on the other, a humanistic value system in which people become the ends, while capital and technology merely serve as the intermediate means. As a result, the model can be applied quite conveniently to the behavioural analysis of any institution, economic, social or political. Furthermore, the behaviour of the organization can be considered in parallel with, as well as in the same terms as, its individual members. However, the approach, as presented here, is limited in its analysis of the interaction between man and technology, and of the relationship between individual and financial productivity and profitability. Perhaps a parallel 'biological' analysis of organizations, where analogies from an organism's physical behaviour were brought into institutional play, would serve to overcome this limitation.

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Peter Hartley

## Communicating about Communication

I 'became' a Humanistic Psychologist before I knew there was such an animal. And I suppose that the growth of my interests is fairly typical - I enjoyed teaching and had to find a job to keep the wolf away from the door, but I didn't want to teach psychology in the way that I had been taught. Although my undergraduate course was a lot broader than most, it still hadn't fired my imagination. There had been a missing link somewhere along the line.

Eventually I tripped over an advertisement that sounded interesting - Lecturer in Communication. I took the job, now I'm firmly embedded in an 'academic growth area'; witness the forthcoming conference in London on the *Future of Communication Studies* with some extremely high-powered international speakers. I suspect that many readers of *Self and Society* are sympathetic to/interested in this area, and I should like this article to initiate some sort of dialogue. 'Communication Studies' is important in that if it develops along lines that I would approve, it will have objectives which are highly

compatible with those of Humanistic Psychology.

### Do you want to know a secret?

One major sin of the Social Sciences is their failure to tell the general public what they are about. Announce 'I am a psychologist' to a group of strangers and you will uncover the often bizarre fantasies that people have about our 'powers'. I remember someone who refused to look me straight in the eye after I had made this pronouncement. Presumably he was worried that I couldn't switch my mind-reading beam off. At least I don't get this reaction if I announce myself as a 'lecturer in communication' - usually I receive a blank stare. If I continue to say that I'm interested in human communication as opposed to electronic engineering (telecommunications), people often say 'Oh! Yes! You mean psychology.' And you can't criticise people who are locked in this semantic fog when they have no choice. If I have no information to work on, I also rely on stereotypes. Unhappily, this situation also occurs in academic