

Reading:

- Carl Rogers: On Personal Power
 On Becoming A Person
Liam Hudson: Frames of Mind
Gerald Egan: The Skilled Helper
Virginia Satir: People-Making

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SYNECTICS: CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

The primary focus of the vast majority of groups in the human potential movement is the growth and development of the 'individual' in that group. Gestalt, bioenergy and psychosynthesis groups are some of the major examples. Few, if any, groups seem to be convened for a purpose beyond the specific development of the individual(s), focusing directly on such issues as conflict resolution in a divided team or how to get creative action and behaviour in a group of people working together.

This is not to say that more effective conflict resolution and more creative behaviour in a group does not result from an individual's development,; there is no doubt that it does. What it is saying is that the express purpose of the group is different and as a result the training methods, techniques taught and benefits gained are likely to be very different.

Regarding now, the matter of the development of a 'group' or 'team' or the individual as a team member there seem to be two basic approaches:

- a) the spiritual or intuitive approach
- b) principles or techniques which experience shows to be effective and productive

The first approach is much the area of focus of the Findhorn Community in Northern Scotland with their work and insight into 'group consciousness' and 'group being'. The basic assumption seeming to be that at some raised level of consciousness or awareness there is no conflict, no inherent difference. This consciousness has been called the level of the self or cosmic consciousness. The task for the individuals in the group is to raise their consciousness to this 'higher' level for guidance and insights to their action.

The second approach ('principles based on experience') is the area of Synectics, a body of knowledge developed from asking over a period of twenty years the following question:

"Did what happened in that meeting increase or decrease the probability of success of that meeting?"

A meeting is defined as being two or more people working together on some task and the *"probability of success"* breaking down into two components:

- a) success against the **task** (the functional component)
- b) did what happened increase or decrease the probability that I would wish to work together with those people (the inter-personal component)

DIFFERENT ORIENTATION

It is this combination of task and inter-personal orientation that would differentiate Synectics from several humanistic approaches to groups and working teams. The emphasis on **task** and results is an orientation often necessitated by the realities of business life (the production line must be repaired, the newspaper must meet the midnight train). The Findhorn approach, as I understand it, is that personal disturbances come first. My sense is that this 'people first' orientation is the focus of the humanistic approach. Synectics endeavours to combine the two - task and people.

There is no doubt that the humanistic approaches to the group have a great deal to offer. They would, however, usually have to include a 'task' and 'results' focus in order to be acceptable. The business world are basically interested in effectiveness - humanistic psychology and growth are more oriented towards wholeness. The difference in orientation is not, in my view, that great.

KEY FEATURE OF SYNECTICS

a) Process and Content

Every meeting or interaction has two components: process and content. The process is the 'how' (we were sharing information, asking questions, arguing, etc. etc.) whereas the content is the 'what' (the information about annual pay rises and holiday time).

Another general observation is that in most meetings the distinction between 'process' and 'content' is not made clear or is assumed to be the responsibility of the senior person or chairman. We find that there are major advantages in separating responsibility for control of 'process' of the meeting from essence, is the study of the process(es) adopted by successful teams when working successfully together. These processes have been extracted, distilled and are presented in a structured framework; a framework which if followed tends to increase dramatically the probability of success of the working group.

b) Process leaders and Problem-Owners

The separation of process and content is achieved by appointing a full-time process leader who takes no part in the content of the meeting. The 'process leader' is a sort of traffic controller, whose responsibility is to ensure communications are effective, that the behavioural rules are observed and the resources are used to serve the needs of the problem owner or 'client' who has the responsibility to act in the area of the problem. Process leading is, in itself a full-time and skilled job and is a skill that can be learned.

The 'client/problem-owner' takes the decisions as to content direction and is likely to take many of the major process decisions. It, too, is an important and skilled job, there are good problem-owners and there are others I know I would not want to work for again. The traditional chairman may, therefore, be divested of both process and content responsibility with the power for decision-making in these areas being re-allocated. This re-allocation of roles by itself

removes much of the negative effects of the senior person in the hierarchy taking the decisions.

c) Structured Creativity

One of the more distinct features of Synectics is its structured approach to creativity. This seeming paradox is achieved by the process/content distinction. Synectics has studied processes which have a high probability of resulting in creative outcomes. The process of the creative meeting is structured to increase the likelihood of a creative 'content' in the meeting. The guidelines are necessary to create the environment for creative behaviour and action that are unlikely to result from typical meeting interaction.

SYNECTICS AND HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

The fact that there are basic differences in emphasis and focus between the typical growth group and a Synectics group has been highlighted. This hides many similarities, particularly at the level of the underlying philosophy. This has much to do with the fact that both Synectics and humanistic psychology are based on the study of the successful and the creative.

There are similarities in some of the basic concepts underlying both areas. The concept of Action Responsibility is a central one in Synectics. It involves identifying clearly who has responsibility for actually implementing the new ideas and solutions that are generated by the creative process. Much of the preparatory planning work in Synectics is in the area of establishing action responsibility. This is because if we make our own decisions about the action we should take, we are more motivated to act, to persevere in the face of difficulty and to learn from the experience. The notion of individual responsibility is also central to most of the humanistic therapies.

Other central concepts which are similar involve finding value in people and their ideas. Our experience is that people focus initially on what they don't like in an idea or person. This type of critical and analytical behaviour tends naturally to be developed by the education system. Creative action, however, is the result of two very different modes of working and thinking:

- a) Non Evaluative Thinking
- b) Developmental Thinking
- finding value and re-directing from the negative

There are modes of working that can be developed and taught. They are central to creative working in a team.

Finally, both Synectics and the humanistic psychologies start from the assumption that the individual is inherently creative and able to make their own decisions about their working life. We encourage a philosophy of being in business for yourself and mind your own business. This final concept implies giving ideas **only** when they are asked for and avoids the invidious "if I were you" or "you should" with everyone doing everyone else's business - a major cause of organisational friction.

CONCLUSION

My feeling is that while humanistic theory and practice has much to offer business on the 'people' dimension, business has much to offer in terms of action and getting things done. I feel Synectics goes a long way to reconciling these two polarities. I hope this issue of Self and Society is a further contribution.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING THIS SUMMER?

Charles Berner, who originated and developed a remarkable method for concentrated centering and self discovery, and his Dyad School of Enlightenment will be in Devon during August, offering:

3-day Enlightenment Intensive
2-week Enlightenment Intensive
10-day Enlightenment Masters Course

Full details in the current issue of **Human Potential Resources** from: 35 Station Road, London NW4 (01-202 4941)

and at **EASTER?**

AL HUANG will be here offering a one-day experience of his Living Tao work on Good Friday and a three-day group (April 18-20)

Details as above.