

PATTERNS OF CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATION

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Collection of papers presented at meetings of the Goals, Processes and Indicators of Development Project of the United Nations University (1978-1982)

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INTRODUCTION

This collection of papers arises from an investigation into the manner in which sets of concepts are ordered and interrelated. The focus is on why phenomena, and especially psycho-social phenomena, tend to be comprehended using concept sets of a particular size range (e.g. 2 to 6 elements). The concern is whether this tendency is taken into account in efforts to order existing psycho-social processes or to design better ones. A special concern is the consequence of using "incomplete" or inadequately diverse sets to order comprehension of any environment or of action in it. These general questions are reviewed in the first paper on Representation, Comprehension and Communication of Sets (which originally appeared in the journal International Classification).

As a cross-cultural, cross-ideological, interdisciplinary experiment the United Nations University project on Goals, Processes and Indicators of Development was especially concerned with the problems of integrating the highly diverse range of concepts, perspectives and viewpoints arising from its work. It was therefore appropriate to collect examples of integrated multi-set concept schemes of the most diverse nature and to compare them with GPID's organization of its own sets of concepts. This is the concern of the second paper on Patterns of N-foldness. The examples are given in Annexes 0-20. To facilitate comparison they are ordered by number of set elements. The paper itself discusses some tentative approaches to the process of comparison.

In interrelating highly diverse focal concepts it would be naive to ignore the fact that those identifying with such different concepts tend to disagree and to oppose each other. Such dynamics need to be taken into account if the resulting integration is to be of more than academic significance. The difficulty is that the ability of conventional methodologies to encompass essentially incommensurable concepts is poorly developed - methodologies themselves tend to be mutually "hostile". In such a situation it is necessary to move "Beyond Method" (title of the third paper) if a diversity of methods is to be interrelated in a manner which is relevant for integrated development. In addition to discussing these questions, the third paper describes an exercise in designing a multi-set concept scheme in the light of the diversity inherent in the examples given in Annexes 0-20. The intention was to "internalize" the maximum amount of disagreement within the scheme as a guarantee of its relevance to a society in which disagreement is rife, whether constructive or destructive. The exercise resulted in an ordered series of 210 mutually-incompatible, transformation-oriented statements (given in Annex 21). It may be considered as an initial step towards more realistic organization of psycho-social development, cured of the tendency to "disagreement phobia" and of the desperate compensatory pursuit of agreement-promoting processes.

In the above discussion the emphasis is on static sets of concepts and recognition of the psycho-social dynamics associated with conceptual incommensurability. The question now is how such dynamics

are themselves to be ordered and comprehended. In the fourth paper, Liberation of Integration, the aim is to show that many widely advocated approaches to integration are relatively simple options in a context of subtler, more complex possibilities, many of which are essentially more "elegant". However it is possible that this elegance is also an indicator of properties of symmetry, harmony and balance, which are desirable in any domain in which integration is sought and even necessary for that integration to be both brought about and sustained (by its inherent comprehensibility). In this paper the relevance of ordered patterns of time is explored, especially in the light of the evolution of concepts of integration in music and harmony seen here as a precursor of new approaches to psycho-social organization. Attention is also drawn to the special significance this has for transforming understanding of possibilities of individual identification with processes ordered over time.

This theme, ordering transformation dynamics, has been further explored in a series of papers on "alternation", its challenge to comprehension, and its implications for organizations. These appear separately in a volume entitled: Policy Alternation for Development.

In the fifth paper Concept Factors in Concept Scheme Integration, the basic concepts governing the GPID project itself (see Annex 0) are used as a case study in an exercise exploring the possibilities of a more systematic approach to concept integration. This is based on arguments presented in the first paper.

The following paper on Integrative Dimensions of Concept Sets is concerned with the problem of how to minimize loss of significance when a concept set is considered too complex to be communicated comprehensibly to a particular audience. In such a case it must be transformed, possibly by collapsing some distinctions, so as to reduce the number of conceptual elements in the set by a factor of 2, 3 or more. When collapsed in this way, the original distinctions may then be considered implicit rather than explicit.

The final paper, Beyond Edge-bound Comprehension and Modal Impotence is a set of notes concerning the problem of disentangling the levels of confusion which a group (or an individual) may experience when faced with a set of concepts that is beyond its collective grasp. In such a situation special dynamics are engendered around whatever parts of the set can be grasped. These take on characteristics significant for psycho-social organization when different parts are comprehended by different members of the group or when the group comprehends all such parts each in turn, namely one-at-a-time only in a temporal sequence or cycle.

Topics in the last two papers touch on themes explored in more detail in the separate volumes in the series: Policy Alternation for Development, From Networking to Tensegrity Organization, and Forms of Presentation and the Future of Comprehension.