

POLICY ALTERNATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

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Papers arising from work in connection with the Goals, Processes and Indicators of Development Project of the United Nations University (1978-1982)

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Contents

Introduction	v
Development through alternation	1
Index	2a
Metaphors of alternation	175
Index	
Networking alternation	203
ANNEX	
Networking conditions and changes in the light of the Chinese Book of Changes	217

INTRODUCTION

Many "answers" have been produced in response to the current crisis, however it is perceived. In the first paper, on Development through Alternation it is argued that it is this focus on "answer production" which itself obscures both the significance of the lack of fruitful integration between existing answers and the manner in which such answers undermine each other's significance. This mind-set also fails to recognize the positive significance of the continuing disruptive emergence of new "alternative" answers.

Policy integration initiatives at this time are themselves fragmented and usually hostile, to a degree usefully interpreted in terms of the metaphor of a "gladiatorial arena" in which the survival of any integrative answer must be bought at the price of the elimination of all other competitors. There is considerable confusion about the nature of integration and it is difficult to imagine that integrative processes favoured by one group would be considered to be of much significance by another. This phenomenon cannot be disguised by simply opting for "networking" processes or viewing it as a "healthy" feature of academic or political debate.

The nature of answers is examined in this paper with a view to understanding the characteristics of "the" viable answer required at this time. Answer production is portrayed as a necessary consequence of preoccupation with accumulation of significance (or even with the accumulation of merit, as stressed in some religions). As such it is subject to a generalized version of the radical criticism of capital accumulation processes, itself therefore inadequate as the basis for a complete answer. Under such essentially paradoxical conditions, it is argued that the difficulty in facilitating human and social development lies in the exclusive nature of current approaches. These fail to internalize the discontinuity, incompatibility and disagreement which their existence engenders, in a way such as to "contain" the development process, whether conceptually or organizationally.

In this light, current efforts in search of "the" answer appear misdirected. It is argued that non-equilibrium dissipative structures with self-organizing characteristics are required to contain the discontinuities of the development process. The resulting "new order" is thus engendered by the fluctuation in practice between the extreme policies of essentially antagonistic answers - the very fluctuation which the proponents of each answer at present

make every effort to prevent, as a way of ensuring their dominance in the short-term, but at the expense of their development over the longer term. Development is then best reinterpreted as learning (itself more broadly understood) through such discontinuous fluctuation processes. Such learning needs to be conceived as cyclic rather than linear, with current answers being effectively "frozen" portions of the cycles, through which they are effectively integrated. The desperate search for "the" new magical alternative model of development (of necessarily temporary and limited appeal) can thus be usefully complemented by a concern for models of alternation to order the pattern and timing of cyclic transformation between many such alternatives, as and when they emerge. In such a context, "primitive" alternatives from the past may also prove to be temporarily desirable under certain conditions.

While it is relatively easy to make the above point using logical arguments, such logical arguments lack credibility. Within an international community of discourse committed to the elaboration and defence of static positions, standpoints and viewpoints, any form of alternation can only appear to resemble vacillation rather than a self-organizing oscillation between viable alternatives. Understanding the policy relevance of alternation may therefore only be possible through metaphors illustrating the dynamics of the relationship between alternatives. This is the purpose of the second paper on Metaphors of Alternation. Since each such policy is a "language" or mindset whereby a world-view is organized, no adequate "logical" framework can exist to facilitate comprehension of the nature of such a shift or the transition between alternatives. Many familiar metaphors of alternation exist however through which the characteristics of such shifts may however be understood.

Whilst it is indeed possible that alternation may suggest an elegant way beyond the current savage competition between hostile policies, there is a need to give more precise understanding of its significance for policy formation and change. This is the purpose of the third paper on Networking Alternation. This refers to the Annex, which represents the results of an exercise in adapting the significance of the Chinese Book of Changes to the jargon of Western organizational policy-making. The paper shows that characteristic policy simulations familiar to Eastern thinking have well-identified counterparts in Western thinking. The special merit of this Chinese framework is that it addresses the question of mapping the possible shifts between alternative policies.

Organization in the international community has been extensively, if not completely, moulded over the past decades by the Western organizational model. Indeed an "organization" has come to mean a Western style organization. This model has acquired considerable a credibility owing to its successes in many different arenas. The techniques contributing to these successes have been studied and reinforced by management schools, staff training colleges, diplomatic academies, international training programmes, and intergovernmental organizations themselves. Programme failures have been attributed to inadequate training and experience in these skills. The universal validity of the Western model has therefore not been adequately questioned as a possible explanation of the very limited success of many development programmes. Given the severe difficulties encountered by the organizational response to the current crisis using Western modes of thought, it is only appropriate to explore non-Western insights into policy-formulation of which the Chinese classic cited is a prime example. Suprisingly alternation is a process common to fundamental thinking in both East and Western as indicated in the first paper.

Aspects of the points discussed in this volume are treated in the other four volumes of papers in the series: Patterns of Conceptual Integration, Forms of Presentation and the Future of Comprehension, From Networking to Tensegrity Organization, and Transformative Conferencing.

These themes are also explored in the forthcoming volume World Problems and Human Potential (Munich, K G Saur, 1985, ca 1500 pages).