I MEETING FAILURE: ANALYSIS AND CASE STUDIES

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These papers attempt in different ways to clarify the various dimensions of the problem to be faced.
6th International Congress on Congress Organization

MEETING FAILURE AND PARTICIPANT FRUSTRATION

Technical facilitation of meeting dynamics and participant interaction: 1

— from conference organization for well-behaved participants to conference organization for the satisfaction of participants

This is the first of three articles based on a presentation to the session on Technical Equipment at the 6th International Congress on Congress Organization. The second article will be concerned with the types of meeting for which these remarks are particularly relevant. The third article will be concerned with specific possibilities for the technical support of improved conference dynamics.

Introduction

A significant number of conferences, whether national or international, may be judged a failure or a waste of resources despite the fact that (1) all conventional physical technical, administrative facilities and services are used competently with the guidance of experienced personnel; (2) the programme of the conference is well-planned and conforms to the interests and priorities of the different groups of participants; (3) the meeting sessions and the social sessions are well-organized and efficiently run.

A frequent source of participant frustration within a well-organized meeting is the lack of adequate contact between participants in terms of their professional interests and commitments (namely other than purely social contact).

Little attention has been devoted to the technical support of contact formation and the facilitation of the associated meeting dynamics, and specifically to:

(1) facilitating contact between participants within the conference as a whole who do not realize that they have commitments or professional interests in common;
(2) increasing the quantity and the quality of communication between individual participants and/or with the chairman or speaker during a particular meeting session.

This is particularly serious when the objective of the conference is primarily the clarification of issues and the formation of consensus rather than the reporting of substantive information or the satisfaction of protocol requirements.

Conference dynamics summarized

A conference is a dynamic communication environment. It is a concentration and intensification of the pattern of ongoing interaction between participants prior to and following any particular conference. Both the organizers and participants may well meet together frequently in other conference settings on related topics. The particular communication pattern which is enhanced in a given conference by the formal meeting structure selected is a momentary distortion in the general communication pattern. It is considered necessary by the organizers in order to highlight current issues and to provide a means of supplying new information and arriving at consensus. The programme and meeting session structure represent a momentary compromise between:

(1) the organizers' understanding of what participants really want or are willing to pay to receive
(2) the organizers' understanding of what they themselves want and what participants should want
(3) the organizers' understanding of what their sponsors want
(4) and constraints of time, resources, and physical or technical facilities.

However whilst many conferences are organized primarily in the light of interests perceived by the organizer, increasingly conferences must respond to a greater degree to the real needs of the participant as expressed during the conference. Participants do not want to be only consumers of what speakers produce. Conferences are for the benefit of participants, not just for the benefit of speakers and organizing bodies. Conference participants are increasingly critical and less passive in their response to sterile meeting environments and to seemingly arbitrary imposition and manipulation of particular communication patterns during the course of a conference. Experienced participants
have a number of reasons for attending a given conference. They have their own private agendas. For them the travel expenses are in large part justified by the opportunity of meeting colleagues with similar interests with which they may (or may not yet) have long-standing working relationships.

Objectives of fruitful meetings include:
1. maximization of beneficial contact between participants with complementary interests and commitments.
2. maximization of participant ability to
   — initiate new action
   — inform and involve other interested participants
   — form groups and formalize group action (to the degree necessary).
3. maximization of flexibility of programme structure informal meetings and associated meeting room allocation without disrupting the coherence of the conference as a credible setting capable of attracting key resource people and sponsors.

Some indicators that current conference organization is inadequate

The following phenomena may be observed in an "efficiently" run conventional conference:
1. During a session some participants wish to question the speaker but cannot because of time limitations. The selection of those who do speak is arbitrary even when based on a process of selecting and combining written questions collected by hostesses.
2. After a session a group of participants crowds around the speaker(s). Not all can ask questions and not necessarily those with the best questions. The speaker cannot make adequate contact and frequently cannot even speak to his colleagues from other parts of the world with commitments in concurrent sessions.
3. Where the organizers permit and facilitate the use of a message notice board, it is covered in a multitude of messages of great interest but which do not necessarily reach the (busy) persons to whom they are addressed.
4. During meeting sessions, a discontented crowd may form around the coffee bar.
5. According to a Unesco study, it is only the novice conferencegoers who attend the meeting sessions as laid down in the programme. More experienced participants select sessions and parts of sessions and spend the remainder of their time in the hallways talking to the eminent people seated at strategic spots to receive them. However, the most eminent people, according to the Unesco study, are to be found outside the conference centre in a bar arranging the next conference, or other conferences with which they are associated.
6. After a session, if the speaker has copies of his paper available, there is a scramble to obtain one. If not, participants must wait patiently to give their names and addresses to the speaker to receive a copy by mail.

(7) The distribution of documents by participants (whether or not they are speakers), is usually a very haphazard and disorganized process dependent upon the whim of the organizers and the aggressivity of participants with something to distribute.

The key question is: Should participants travel long distances, in many cases thousands of miles at great cost, in the hopes that by chance they may establish contact with just those people having the same, or complementary, professional interests and commitments? Should they be expected to accept features of the programme which do not correspond to the interests of a significant number of participants present, thus wasting their time and the opportunity for the more beneficial interaction which may well have been the factor originally motivating them to attend the conference in the first place?

Extracts from a letter from a group of disenchanted conference participants

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you on behalf of a group of international NGO executives who have just returned from a meeting of two hundred persons from all parts of the world — namely, the International Conference of... On the way back home we began talking about the effectiveness of such events. Some of us attend meetings like this regularly and we are questioning their value. This last conference on the... issue was just as sterile as the previous ones in spite of hopes that we could start afresh. One sees the same faces, only at different meeting sites; one hears the same positions defended and one sits in the same kind of hotel or conference room. Somehow we must find another process for such international gatherings.

As we talked on the way home, we agreed that such meetings of 100-200 participants (assembled at costs estimated at $ 100,000 as a minimum) are like eight cylinder engines running on only two cylinders. We estimated that 85% of the group listened while 15% spoke. Not only is this an extremely inefficient use of human resources, it means that many travelled all this way without ever having the opportunity to express their needs and ideas. The more aggressive persons, those speaking the conference language fluently — the conference professionals, still dominate these events. Frankly we feel such meetings are often oppressive...

Participant communication checklist

To clarify these matters it is useful to look at a checklist of participant communication desires (see pages...). It should be noted that this is quite distinct from a code of conduct for meeting participants, namely how they should behave in order that the meeting should function according to the desires of the organizers (*). In this case, it is rather how the meeting should be organized in order that the participant should be satisfied. The distinction is between the responsibilities of the participant permitted to participate in the conference and the rights of the participant having paid to be there.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index of inter-participant communication effectiveness</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Such an index does not exist. Opinion surveys of participants during and after the meeting might however establish the approximate number of new and useful contacts made per participant. The purpose of such an index would be to enlighten organizers as to the amount of time participants perceive as usefully spent as against time spent conforming to communication requirements perceived as of relatively little use. A key question to a participant might be: how many of the new contacts made after the first day of the conference could have functionally been made on the first day? And: how many contacts were made too late to be functionally explored on that occasion?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Checklist of possible participant communication requirements (tentative)

A participant may well be prepared to pay whatever reasonable cost is necessary in order to have good communication guaranteed by technical support and thus ensure significant benefit from his investment in the (usually considerable) cost of participation in meetings. The participant may be assumed to want the following communication problems to be resolved for him during an ideal conference. The following list does not take into account the conventional problems of sound amplification, interpretation, audio-visual assistance and other facilities increasingly considered as normal.

1. Communication by a participant within a particular session
   a. Ability of a participant to inform (a) the speaker, and/or (b) the chairperson, and/or (c) all participants, and/or (d) a selected group of participants of points such as:
      (1) his agreement or disagreement with the speaker
      (2) his agreement or disagreement with a proposal under discussion
      (3) his desire to move on to the next agenda item
      (4) his desire for clarification of the point being made
      (5) his desire for the speaker to make his point more rapidly
      (6) his desire to adjourn the session
      (7) his desire to break into small group discussion sessions.
   b. Ability of a participant to participate in electronically-assisted weighted voting on issues in order to arrive at consensus without polarization and oversimplification of the issues under discussion.
   c. Ability to receive an extensive summary of a session into which he has come late, or a brief summary of the past 5-10 minutes of the session if he has been otherwise temporarily occupied.
   d. Ability to convey a message to any other participant he can identify during the course of a meeting session (e.g. to the last speaker from the floor to several speakers from the floor with whom he is in agreement).
   e. Ability to exchange messages with one or more known people during a session to determine a common course of action (e.g. on leaving for a discussion over coffee, or discussion on how to vote).

2. Communication by a participant within the conference framework

2.1 With the organizers
   a. Ability to convey messages to (and receive messages from) the administrative officer responsible for visaing travel, hotel and other such arrangements.
   b. Ability to receive up-to-the-minute information on
      (1) the conference programme amendments
      (2) the reallocation of rooms for meeting sessions
      (3) any rescheduling of his own time in the light of the previous points, particularly when he has commitments in particular sessions.

2.2 With other participants in general
   a. Provision of a (regular updated) list of names of people present at the conference with some indication of how they may best be contacted.
   b. Provision of a (regular updated) list of names of people present at the conference with interests and commitments similar to those he has indicated as his own.
   c. Ability to inform all (interested) participants of:
      (1) a proposal for a new issue for discussion or action.
      (2) a proposal for the organization of a new working group.
      (3) the announcement of a briefing session or audio-visual event.
      (4) a proposal for a new resolution.
      (5) names proposed for election and to receive the names of the persons interested.
   d. Ability to leave messages for (and receive messages from) people he is not able to contact directly with the minimum of delay before the messages are received.
   e. Ability to have a series of contact meetings (two or more persons) scheduled and re-scheduled according to the changing availability of his prospective contacts, the respective priorities he attaches to them, and his and their respective fixed commitments.
   f. Ability to specify which portions of his time are
      (1) definitely committed to particular sessions
      (2) definitely committed to his own private schedule
      (3) definitely committed to particular contact meetings, however the other person may want them re-scheduled
      (4) currently available for automatic scheduling and re-scheduling of proposed contact meetings.
   g. Ability to re-specify his interests and communication preferences as new issues emerge during the conference or as more desirable communication possibilities become evident.
   h. Ability to acquire a mailing list of participants having certain types of interest in order that he may send to them (1) during the conference, or (2) after the conference, a copy of some text/report/brochure/meeting invitation, etc.
   i. Ability to indicate the specific areas of activity in which he has engaged in the past, possibly with an indication of the resulting reports (or articles), so that other participants can leave messages indicating that they would like to be sent copies (or receive further details) after the conference.

2.3 With much-solicited key persons (in the case of a non-key person)

   Ability to indicate to a selected eminent person his particular interest and reason for a private discussion, given that such persons are usually faced with the need to reduce the number of people with whom they interact on such occasions.

2.4 With non-key persons (in the case of another key person)

   The following measures are required, particularly by popular or eminent persons, to prevent exposure to a flood of communication which they may not be able, or wish, to handle. (They are specially required to reduce communication from persistent, or even eccentric, participants.)
   a. Ability to specify
      (1) from what categories of participant he does (or does not) want to receive communications
      (2) from which specific participants he definitely does (or does not) want to receive communications
   b. Ability to specify
      (1) to which categories of participant he may be available for contact, if there is similarity or complementarity of interest.
(2) in what sort of context he is prepared to make contact (private meeting, coffee sessions, interaction with a group, talk to a small meeting, or prepared conference, etc.)
(3) what maximum period he is prepared to allocate to such a contact
(4) what he is prepared to do in any session specifically arranged for his participation.

c. Ability to exchange messages with (possibly unknown) participants to ensure, if necessary, that they define precisely the purpose of any proposed contact meeting.

d. Ability to specify
   (1) which people should be able to leave priority messages for his attention
   (2) which people should only be able to leave non-priority messages for his attention.

e. Ability to specify which people should be informed, but not consulted, about his re-scheduling of his contacts with them.

f. Ability, in the case of a speaker, to receive messages containing the names and addresses of participants who request a copy of the text of the speech, when available.

g. Ability not to have his name listed in the general lists of participants and their interests as distributed to certain categories of participants, but only a contact number, in order that he can assess the quality of the proposed contact before responding.

2.5 With key persons (in the case of another key person)
The following measures are required in order to facilitate communications between key persons present at a conference.

a. Ability to specify which people should be able to contact him immediately and directly, without the necessity of leaving messages, or by leaving priority messages.

b. Ability to specify
   (1) which (even more eminent) people have the right to re-schedule their planned contacts with him, without consultation
   (2) which people he must consult before re-scheduling his contacts with them.

3. Communication by a participant with the outside world

a. Ability to receive messages from his home office and send messages to his home office.

b. Ability to communicate (i.e., leave and receive messages) with other individuals unable to attend the conference physically because of commitments elsewhere, such that for many purposes they may be considered to be present at the conference.

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Implication of augmented meeting dynamics for conference organization

1. Necessity for organizers to be able to re-schedule, during the course of the conference, on the basis of information received at that time:

   (1) the allocation of pre-planned sessions to particular rooms, according to the number of persons who indicate they will attend. (This might include the cancellation of some sessions to give place to others.)

   (2) the allocation of rooms to sessions proposed at the last minute on the basis of interests that have emerged during the course of a particular session.

   (3) the allocation of audio-visual equipment and simultaneous interpretation facilities to meeting rooms according to revised requirements.

2. Necessity for organizers to be able to exert the optimum degree of control over the flow of communications in order to maximize interparticipant contact and formulation of new activity without completely disrupting the conference or exceeding the possibilities of the available facilities.

3. Necessity for organizers to be able to shift the balance of communication patterns between

   (1) an essentially hierarchical mode

   (2) a small group session mode

   (3) an amorphous meeting node

in order to achieve the advantages of the network mode wherever possible. Clearly whenever the meeting is moving towards sterility, increased participant inter-action should be facilitated, but whenever this increases beyond the ability of the conference to contain it, then the hierarchical mode should be used to a greater extent.

4. Necessity for organizers to be able to invoice participants according to their precise use of the conference dynamic facilities (e.g., on a cost per communication or per contact basis), or to identify which forms of such communications should be subsidized to facilitate certain types of communication essential to the healthy dynamics of the conference (e.g., on a low or zero cost per communication basis).

Clearly organizers are faced with the problem of handling flexible evolving conference programmes rather than the traditional pre-determined conference programme. These problems have not yet been explored to any degree.


**MEETING TYPES: OLD AND NEW**

Technical facilitation of meeting dynamics and participant interaction: 2

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**Introduction**

In Part I of this paper (January 1976), it was suggested that a significant number of conferences, whether national or international, may be judged a failure or a waste of resources despite the fact that:

1. all conventional physical, technical, and administrative facilities and services are used competently with the guidance of experienced personnel;
2. the programme of the conference is well-planned and conforms to the interests and priorities of the different groups of participants;
3. the meeting sessions and the social sessions are well-organized and efficiently run.

This paper is concerned with the types of meeting which risk being judged a failure under certain circumstances. By coming to a clearer understanding of the flows of communication for different purposes, it may be possible to increase the flexibility with which meetings are designed and conducted. Part I of this paper suggested that new communication flows were required. Part III (in this issue) discusses some technical means of facilitating such flows.

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**Meeting types**

It is useful to distinguish between four basic types of meeting which are best suited to different purposes. The four types are of course extreme cases which in reality blend into one another. The relationships between the extremes can however be usefully illustrated by the accompanying diagram (see Diagram A).

1. **Hierarchical meetings** (see Diagram 1)
   a. Protocol and policy: These tend to involve a speech by an eminent person which participants must listen to either as a gesture of respect, or for reasons of protocol, or as a matter of good public relations, or because it may outline new policies for the first time.
   b. Exhortative: These tend to involve a speech by a respected person exhorting participants to some new effort, namely a speech by a skilled orator conceived as a means of arousing enthusiasm or of changing beliefs in support of some new action.
   c. Information: These tend to involve a speech by some technically competent person in which new facts are presented, or the results of programmes, or a detailed outline of new programmes.
   d. Administration: These tend to involve the presentation of annual or financial reports, election of officers, etc.

Advantages: These include the absence of restriction on the number of participants; the ability for those organizing the meeting to inform large numbers of some current situation; and the ability of participants to hear the views of individuals who would otherwise be inaccessible to them.
Disadvantages: These include the restriction on participant expression; the suppression of viewpoints not in accord with those of the organizers of the meeting, or at least not envisaged within the programme framework; and the channelling of participant expression via the podium rather than directly between participants.

2. Small group meetings (see Diagram 2)
   a. Workshop: These tend to concentrate on the exchange of experiences, discussion of proposals, and clarification of issues.
   b. Committee: These tend to concentrate on the elaboration of specific proposals, drafting of reports, etc.

Advantages: These include the ability to focus in detail and at great length on complex matters; the facilitation of expression of minority viewpoints; and the ability of all present to participate fully in discussion.

Disadvantages: These include the difficulty of informing any plenary session of the substance of the discussions, of taking into account the viewpoints of parallel group meetings on related topics, and of integrating the conclusions into the larger perspective of the plenary body.

3. Amorphous meetings (Diagram 3)
   a. Exhibitions: These involve the free movement of participants and their exposure to a wide variety of information on exhibit stands, according to their special interests.
   b. Social occasion: These include unstructured receptions and parties involving much self-selected interaction between participants.
   c. Open-meetings: These are undirected, or minimally directed, large meetings, with much movement and interaction between participants. There is frequently relatively free access to the public-address system.

Advantages: These include considerable opportunity for participants to make contact with one another on the basis of their special interests and to choose the manner in which those interests should be developed (whether by holding a small meeting immediately, or planning some collaborative enterprise for some later date).

Disadvantages: These include a considerable restriction on general coordination and consensus formation verging in some cases on a general state of disorder.

4. Network meetings (Diagram 4)
   This is an emergent form of meeting organization characterized by the following:
   
a. Flexibility: Rapid conversion, in the light of emerging consensus during the course of the meeting, to and from the other forms of meeting organization.
   b. Emergent issues: Identification of emergent issues and formation of subgroups to clarify them rapidly so as to maintain the momentum of the meeting.
   c. Alternative sessions: Organization of alternative sessions not originally envisaged in the programme or room allocation, where significant numbers of participants find that they have more in common on subjects not scheduled in the pre-established meeting programme.

Advantages: These include a much greater response to the needs of participants present rather than the imposition upon them of a programme which may not reflect their preoccupations or the areas in which they consider interaction to be both possible and useful.

Disadvantages: These include considerable strain on the ability of the conference organizers to maintain the coherence of the meeting without having it endangered by emerging issues and desires for programme restructuring.

The first three types of meetings have been well-explored. The dynamics of such meetings and the technical problems of organizing them are well-known. Considerable expertise and technical equipment is available to ensure that such meetings function efficiently and to the satisfaction of participants content with the set-pieces of the pre-established programme.

Such meetings require that participants function in a predictable, well-behaved manner within the framework provided and that their satisfaction with the meeting should primarily be derived from the speakers, panelists and moderators of the sessions established in the printed programme by the organizers.

The focus of such meetings is therefore on the pre-determined meeting session framework. Considerable problems arise if there is any question of modifying the programme and the room allocation in the light of emerging requirements.
from conference organization for well-behaved participants to conference organization for the satisfaction of participants during the course of the conference. Yet it is precisely the emergence of these requirements which shows that the conference is an occasion on which something new is occurring. Because all significant interaction is supposed to take place within the planned sessions, mediated by the speaker and chairman, no attention is normally given to the problems of the interaction between participants independently of such sessions, other than during the formal social events. Contact between participants is facilitated solely by receptions, parties and banquets. No serious attempt is therefore made to establish contact between participants on the basis of their professional interests or commitments. Such contacts may of course occur as a result of chance introductions during social occasions.

Conclusion

It is at least worthwhile investigating how some technical assistance can be given to improving the meeting dynamics when such improvement is considered desirable by in a particular setting. Part III of this paper suggests a number of possibilities. The interesting question is what new types of meeting would emerge through use of such possibilities.

FACILITATIVE TECHNIQUES

for participative meetings

Technical facilitation of meeting dynamics and participant interaction: 3

Introduction

The first two parts of this paper (Part I, January 1976, pp. 34-37, Part II, this issue, pp. 88-90) dealt with the absence of adequate inter-participant communication and contact and attempted to clarify in which types of meeting this might prove critical. In this part, a series of examples of facilitative techniques are given which might lead to the emergence of a new improved style of meeting. It should be stressed that these are only examples and their main purpose is to suggest an area of meeting organization which deserves more imaginative and innovative attention.

Possibilities for technical support of improved meeting dynamics

Participant consensus expression

A simple device can be developed and distributed to participants, in the same way as earphone devices are currently made available, which would permit each participant to indicate any or all of the following:

1. agreement or disagreement with the speaker
2. agreement or disagreement with the proposal under discussion
3. desire to move onto the next point on the agenda
4. desire for clarification of the point being made
5. desire to adjourn the session
6. desire to break into small group discussion sessions or similar points.

The device given to each participant would consist of a set of 6 (or more) switches corresponding to each of the above points. The switches would be linked to a counting device such that when 27 participants pressed the first switch a counter visible to all participants (including the speaker and the chairman) would indicate '27'. The total for each other point would also be indicated at the same time. In this way, at a glance, all participants in the meeting session could determine with greater accuracy the sense of the meeting and how it should be continued. This would help to avoid meandering sessions which tend to make conferences a disappointment and a waste of time.

The device as described could be put together from simple items already marketed. A similar device technically is already used in some special classrooms to enable the teacher to obtain feedback from pupils. A simplified device would in fact be particularly useful in lecture-type situations, whether in classrooms or in conferences.

The great advantage of the device is that it help to change the pattern of communication. Instead of all communications being mediated by the chairman or speaker, participants are able to indicate to one another their assessment of the meeting in a way which prevents the chairman from manipulating the meeting on the basis of his own interpretation of the desires of participants. The use of such a device would introduce much more immediacy into debates since at every moment, in effect, a continuing vote is being made on a number of features of the meeting. (If recorded, as is technically feasible, this would be extremely valuable data for the evaluation of meeting effectiveness, particu-
The following, for example, could assist:
(a) in an advisory capacity, for the conference dynamics as a whole, or
(b) in an advisory capacity during a particular meeting session of
(c) by intervening in pre-determined ways in order to improve the dynamics.

1 Meeting dynamics consultant: concerned primarily with: the general pattern and intensity of communications flow; the diminution of bottle-necks and sterile patches and abusive manipulation of communication opportunities; and attempting to promote the emergence of synergism from the totality of isolated contacts and group interaction.

2 Inter-cultural consultant: concerned primarily with: bridging cultural gaps and creating an awareness of cultural sensibilities which might otherwise be ignored creating offence or otherwise hindering the establishment of good communications between participants.

3 Inter-disciplinary consultant: concerned primarily, in the case of interdisciplinary meetings, with bridging the gaps in the communication between people with different disciplinary backgrounds.

With the progressive increase in specialization, the future may see the emergence of a new type of conference professional, namely the interterminology interpreter as contrasted with the present inter-language interpreter. Interdisciplinary interpretation could now be said to be achieved in the same way as interlanguage conference interpretation fifty years ago.

Graphic mapping of discussion points and issues

1) It is possible to produce one or more maps showing the relationships between the issues which are the concern of the conference as a whole or of a particular meeting session. These serve to sharpen the focus of debate and are a basis for contact between similarly concerned participants. Clearly such maps may be modified during the course of meeting sessions.

2) The future may well see the emergence of a new type of conference professional in contrast to the present stenographer or minute writer. This would be a person able to isolate, display and interrelate, on a large-screen graphic display device, the points and relationships as they are made and recognized by a speaker, as well as those attacked by him, or by his opponents in debate, or reinforced by his supporters. Such a display, and its reproduction as a map or series of maps at the adjournment of each session would considerably sharpen the focus of debate and give precision to the pattern of contacts sought and made between participants and opposing groups.

Multi-meetings

There is increasing use of parallel or concurrent group and commission meetings during a conference. At present each such meeting session is part of one programme established by a single organizing committee. However, participants often have interest in a number of related organizations which each hold conferences. Occasionally several such bodies agree to hold their meetings concurrently, or with a partial overlap, to permit participants to attend sessions within both programme frameworks. This - multi-meetings - could be developed, particularly with adequate technical support, to permit a variety of organizations to hold their conference simultaneously, with overlap and joint sessions wherever feasible.

Costing formal meeting sessions

A special type of clock has been developed in Denmark to time meetings of corporate executives. Before the meeting the salaries per minute of each executive present are fed into the clock. As each minute of the meeting passes the clock totalizes the cost of the meeting up to that time. An alternative for international meetings would be to show the cost per minute in relation to the travel expenses of participants, or in terms of an appropriate portion of the conference budget.

Participant communications unit

Individuals can already obtain briefcase-sized portable communications terminals which can be used to interface with a telephone system or a computer system. Just as conference participants are issued (possibly on payment of a deposit) with multi-channel telephone systems for use during a conference, so it would be possible to issue them with communications units for use anywhere in the conference complex or in their hotel rooms. This would be an ideal means for storing and transferring messages and other information (1) from the organizers to all (or selected) participants or (2) between participants as desired.
Computer-assisted voting

1. Mechanical voting: The concept of a voting board whereby each participant can only use a button on his desk, his vote on a particular issue is now well-understood. This technique is however only used for formal voting and not for the expression of participant opinion during the course of a debate (as suggested in point A above). Future developments of this technique will require that participants first identify themselves in some way (by inserting a card or a special number) before their votes are accepted.

2. Weighted voting systems:

1) Card assisted: By extending the use of the electronic voting system noted in the previous paragraphs, it will become possible to allocate a definite number of votes to each participant according to some agreed criteria. Once he identifies himself, he is then able to allocate however many votes he has either for (or against) a particular issue, or else to some other participant whom he allows to vote for him.

2) Consensor: A device, known as the "Consensor", already marketed in the United States (by Applied Futures Inc., Connecticut), is a quantifying voting device which can be used by participants to explore and clarify attitudes and judgments concerning the questions and problems that a meeting has set out to discuss. As currently marketed, it is suitable for meetings of 5 to 16 participants. The hand-held unit enables each participant to express his views by means of two switches: one to select between the alternatives being voted upon; a second to indicate the intensity with which the participant is in agreement or disagreement. The results are indicated on a visual display unit visible to all participants.

3) Complex voting: By using a computer to calculate and interrelate votes, there is virtually no limit to the complexity and subtlety permissible in a meeting voting system. Beyond the one-participant-one-vote system, and the simple weighted voting systems lie many possibilities for interrelating and weighting votes. These have not been explored. They are particularly significant because it may well be that only in a meeting environment equipped to facilitate such complex decision-making will it be possible to establish the very delicate coalitions (conditional and temporary) of partially opposing groups which may be the only degree of consensus which can emerge. The technology and software capability is available. The cost of the necessary electronic calculators now brings them within the reach of every conference-goer's pocket. Such calculators could be specially programmed or designed for conference-goers (as they are for other specialized tasks).

Computer-assisted contact formation

The use of computers to assist in the organization of conferences, particularly the administrative problems of mailing and registration, is now becoming accepted. Software packages are being developed. This use of the computer does indeed assist the conference organizer but it does not help the conference participant - it may even give him a heightened impression of being a numbered body in a participant processing machine. Computer software packages can also be developed to monitor the dynamics of a conference onto a new level in order to facilitate the kinds of communication noted in the checklist. The technique could work as follows, for example:

1. Individual registration cards: These would be an extension of the existing registration document. Different cards would be required for: (a) non-specialist visitor; (b) specialist visitor; (c) ordinary participant; (d) eminent participant (specialist); (e) eminent participant (non-specialist), etc. On these cards the participants would indicate (if they wished to benefit from contact assistance):

1.1 Profile
- a. Topics of special interest
- b. Preferred method of treating such subjects
The participants would be able to modify any such profile during the course of the conference as new issues emerged or alternative contact opportunities become evident.

1.2 Availability
- a. Which categories of participant should be informed in the case of complementarity of interest and commitment
- b. Context preferred for exploring the topic (e.g., individual contact, small group, large group, guided tours, etc.)
- c. For what maximum period
- d. What he is prepared to contribute to a group session on the topic
- e. etc.
The participants would be able to modify any such profile during the course of the conference as the characteristics of the participating categories became clearer and as his available time was reduced.

2. Event registration card: These would be prepared for each:
- a. exhibition stand
- b. planned meeting session
- c. planned informal session
- d. audio-visual display
- e. guided tour (f) etc.
On these cards would be indicated:

2.1 Profile
- a. Topics emphasized
- b. Method of treating the topic
- c. Preferred range of participant types
- d. etc.
The responsible officials would be able to modify any such profile during the course of the conference in the light of participant reaction to the planned event within the conference framework.

2.2 Restriction on participation
- a. Which categories of participant should be informed in the case of complementarity of interest
- b. Maximum number of participants
- c. Ability of the responsible body to supply further information, if requested
- d. etc.
As before, these restrictions could be changed during the course of the conference in the light of participant reaction to the planned event.

3. Computer-matching: The information on all the cards would be sorted by computer in order to supply periodically (e.g. 2 to 5 times per day):
- a. to each participant: a personalized list of people with complementary professional interests or commitments
- b. to each organizer of a planned event: a list of people who have indicated an interest in that event as described
- c. to each organizer of a proposed event: a list of people who have indicated an interest in that event as described
- d. to all concerned: a revised allocation of meeting rooms and meeting times, in the light of the interest manifested for particular events and the physical and technical constraints.

4. Dynamics: By responding to the information received, all concerned can modify their actions within the conference environment according to their best advantage and in the light of the possibilities which emerge from each new contact made. Such a system lends itself to many other possibilities, including integration with conventional administration of the conference, or
with the computer conferencing technique described in the next section.

**Computer conferencing**

The computer conference is a new communication technique which is already in use in a number of situations in the United States. Further developments are envisaged but basically it is a means of enabling many people to "attend" invisible meetings that run continuously 24 hours a day for as long as the participants want. At its simplest level, it is a written form of a conference telephone call. A participant can communicate with a group of people by typing messages and reading, on a display screen or a printout, what the other people are saying. The computer automatically informs the group when someone leaves the discussion, permitting him to continue once again when he rejoins the group.

**Major advantages over verbal communication are:**
- participants can be both geographically and chronologically dispersed; many people can talk and listen simultaneously;
- participants can contribute at their own convenience, rather than having to wait until other speakers have finished, or being obliged to speak quickly with inadequate time for reflection;
- all messages for him are stored until he wants to reply to them in the order he chooses;
- participant contributions can be anonymous or identified by a number, leading to more uninhibited discussions;
- results of votes are presented only as distributions and are therefore adequately secret;
- during the conference, participants may communicate privately with one or more other selected participants, leading to more rapid resolution of important issues;
- a permanent record may be kept, and possibly indexed for selective retrieval.

**Long-distance computer conferencing**

This "glamorous" form of computer-conferencing is unpopular with the organizers of conventional meetings because it may lead to fewer international meetings being held. In particular it offers a means of linking by satellite contiguous regions between which travel is difficult (e.g. the West African countries). These possibilities are currently being explored for some developing regions.

**Computer conferencing during large conferences at one location**

The techniques being developed for long-distance computer-conferencing can be used at much lower cost during the course of a large conference. Because of the scepticism of conventional conference organizers, this possibility has not been considered. There is however no reason why participants should not have access to terminals, whether in the meeting rooms, in special rooms, or in their hotel rooms (or with the use of the Participant Communications Device described under point G above). This technique could provide the basis for fulfilling all the requirements noted in the participant communication checklist, including:
- ability of a key person to respond selectively to questions addressed to him;
- facilitation of interest group formation in the light of emergent issues;
- ability of all participants to exchange and channel messages in parallel with any formal meeting sessions;
- ability of organizers to contact any groups of participants;
- ability to reschedule meeting sessions and individual contact;
- ability to build up select lists of participants with particular interests;
- ability to use computer analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the communication patterns during a particular period.

- ability to arrange for the accurate invoicing of the communications sent and received, with the ability to subsidize (completely or partially) some kinds of communication.
- etc.

**Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to show that there is a whole range of meeting techniques requiring new kinds of technical equipment and support. These may not be necessary for many conventional conferences but unless they are available for some kinds of conference, the cost of such occasions will be recognized as increasingly unjustified. Experience with such techniques and their technical support could prove a determining factor in attracting conferences to particular conference centres.

Clearly once a particular international organization, conference organization, or conference centre becomes known for the manner in which it guarantees a quantum jump in participant interaction and sense of satisfaction, the meetings it organizes will become worth the extra expenditure to get to wherever the meeting is held and benefit from the use of such facilities.
Introduction
This is a report on an extraordinary international event which took place in Florence (19-28 February 1978) under the name «New Age Congress». The Congress was unusual in so many ways that any conventional report can only contribute to the pattern of reflections around the event rather than producing a neatly ordered overview. Consider the «confusion» surrounding the following points which are normally very clear for any conventional gathering:

Organizers: The «organizing committee» changed its nature, function and composition every week or so, from its origin in 1977 right up to and through the opening of the congress. It absorbed new individuals, who moved to Florence at various times prior to the event, in order to contribute in one way or another. This process, and the associated conflicts, was a traumatic experience for all concerned — but an experience recognized and accepted (with much difficulty) as necessary to the refinement of the vision of the nature of the congress. In most cases those attracted together in this way had neither met before nor been members of the same association — and yet they all shared aspects of a deeply felt sense of commitment to a common but undefined purpose. It was accepted that each such individual had something unique to contribute to the organizing process.

Theme / Purpose: The theme was only put into written form and distributed 7 weeks before the Congress and even then it was expressed in the most general terms:

«We are coming together in Florence in February to explore, experience and celebrate human transformation. In that beautiful setting where flourished the first renaissance of modern times, the opportunity is being presented to facilitate and confirm the birth of a New Renaissance.

You are invited to participate as a co-equal, co-creative delegate in the colloquia and workshops, to experience the many presentations and associated events of this World Congress, which should prove to be an historic and unifying event. The expansive work of all of the participants will be to consider the dimensions of the New Age, of the New Renaissance and of alternative futures. Participants will daily question, learn, congress and celebrate using the general principles of growth found in the processes and structures of Nature.

Let us see with ever greater clarity that our planet is undergoing a radical change out of which arises is an impulse of creative synthesis. An all-inclusive unitive power floods the feelings, thoughts, and motivations of attuned people everywhere, igniting a common vision of renewed organic earth. A new consciousness and the energy of a new dispensation for humankind is now emergent. The signs are everywhere. The pace of transition depends directly upon us. Wherever we are, there is that thing which it is appropriate for us to do, to hasten a new and better day».

It is typical of the event and of the attitudes of those involved that the final text used in the printed programme consisted of paragraphs extracted from a circular letter mailed independently by a person who had briefly visited the organizing group in Florence after the above text had been distributed.

Finance: At no time did the Congress have a well-defined budget. In many identified the source of income as composed of gifts ranging from $4,000 to $58 from 17 individuals, and loans ranging from $2,500 to $500 from 8 individuals. An early budget estimate was $400,000, and the Congress was finally held on a budget of $40,000. The other main sources of income were registration fees (at $40 per participant, plus gifts) and film rights. The Congress ended with $42,000 debts which have to be cleared by the same process of individual commitment. Many of those most committed placed themselves personally in debt to make the Congress happen.

Publicity: As noted, above circular mailings were first distributed only 2
months before the event. Publicity was severely restricted by shortage of funds for printing and postage, by lack of adequate mailing lists and by the well-known problems of the Italian postal system. Much was however accomplished by word-of-mouth and personal contact — despite the wider reverberations of the conflicts between those participating in the organizing process.

Participants: At no period prior to the event itself was it at all clear how many people would be attracted to the Congress. Very early hopes were for 1500, although it was believed by some that the event would be worthwhile even if only 60 people participated. The actual number was 300, of which over half were present for the full 10-day period. Oddly enough, although the majority of participants spoke English, the nationalities of participants were never a matter of interest. About 40% of the participants were of North American origin, although many were resident in Europe. Others were from most Western European countries and Yugoslavia with a significant number from the UK and Italy. The kinds of person participating are discussed below.

Results: The organizing committee deliberated on how to define the results, if any, which would emerge from the congress process. Considerable effort was however put into the production of a documentary film (by professionals acting in a private capacity) based on the Congress and its environment — with the expectation of distributing it through TV networks around the world (1). It so happened that the finances precluded recording speeches (except occasionally as part of film-making). There was no desire to push for recommendations, declarations or resolutions. A book is being produced (2) containing contributions of some key resource people present but this does not attempt to reflect the heart of the congress process. No rapporteur was appointed or desired. A number of individuals present, including journalists, planned to report on the Congress in the light of their own experience and note-taking. This is one such report. It is as partial and subjective as the other attempts to reflect what occurred.

Organization-Programme

A great deal of effort prior to the Congress was put into designing and organizing a tentative programme of lectures, plenary discussions, workshops and social events — to the extent that this was possible, since even a week before the Congress I was not certain which key resource people were coming. Those involved were very sensitive to the need to make the gathering as participative as possible, benefiting from key resource people giving lectures, but avoiding the tendency to turn the Congress into a vehicle for «super-stars», particularly those anxious for ego-nourishment. It was repeatedly stated that each participant was a resource person and the problem was how best to focus those resources for the benefit of the whole. Suggestions were made in the program concerning discussion group formation by any participants. The first day was organized in a highly participative manner as planned. Already however there was considerable pressure from key resource people to know when they were «on». The number of sign-up sheets for workshops (by «middle-class» resource people), displayed on a single wall, rose quickly from 10 to 60 as competition for the attention of participants increased. The planned events for the second day were thrown into disarray when one of the key «upper-class» resource people threatened to leave unless given a 3-hour plenary solo. This was done. And by the end of that day of excessive conventional structure, a core group of those sensitive to the scheduling problem met to review how the schedule was to be balanced in the light of (a) pressure from super-stars, particularly for long sessions, (b) commitments to super-stars (made by single individuals amongst the core group of organizers), (c) the participative emphasis of the congress and the desire not to over-organize.

At this meeting a compromise was reached to handle in parallel those participants having a preference for «structure» (namely well-ordered lectures and workshops) or for «process» (namely participative discussion and spontaneous workshops). This was implemented on the third day, during which the pressure on the scheduling office and the organizing group continued to increase — whether from unfulfilled super-stars or those wanting to give workshops in the limited space available. The difficulties were compounded by «hit-and-run super-stars» who could only be available for a plenary time-slot convenient to themselves before they had to leave.

These difficulties were presented to a plenary meeting on the fourth day (together with the issue of whether the Congress should, could or would support the position of North American Indians before the international community). This was the first occasion on which it was made clear to the Congress as a whole that it had a responsibility for deciding on its own scheduling priorities for the forthcoming days. However, each group responded in the light of its own interests.

For those who had expected a well-packaged series of events (which had never been the announced intent), the Congress was by now evaluated in such terms as: disorganized, discourteous to eminent speakers, too many leaders, lack of consensus, unfulfilled commitments, lack of adequate communication, etc. A number of participants and speakers had left as a result.

Pressure on the «organizing group» had reached boiling point by the evening of the fourth day. (The organizing group continued to consist of a core of 8-15 people who felt strongly committed to the Congress as a whole. Because of the continuing dynamics amongst members of this diverse group, some were always absent from any particular meeting.) The group was particularly concerned that it was concealing the reality of the Congress from the participants as a...
whole, disguising its acute problems under a neat schedule of events to meet every taste and taking authority in a manner which prevented participants from acting in a fully responsible manner rather than as simple consumers of available « products ». Necessary administrative and other tasks were instigated in a very organic manner as the need was perceived by whoever in the core group was most sensitive to it as it emerged. Essential tasks of food preparation, cleaning, chair arrangement, registration, etc. were performed by volunteers or by some participants in repayment for a waived registration fee. The situation was dramatically changed on the evening of the fourth day at a core group meeting — held as a « fish-bowl event » in the middle of the plenary room (but with only 5-20 observers). After considerable discussion it was unanimously agreed that the meaning of the event in all its ramifications could best emerge if the core group ceased to « organize and schedule » and « step back » in order for the Congress to become aware of itself as a whole. Instead of scheduling events for the following day or thereafter, it was simply agreed that one person would « focalize » a general meeting, if sufficient participants gathered together in the plenary meeting room on the following morning. It was agreed that even the registration desk would be manned in an unscheduled manner by volunteers responding to the need. Such volunteers explained the change which had occurred in case participants did not wish to register. The workshop sign-up sheets were to be removed from the display wall. Once this decision was reached there was truly amazing expression of joy amongst those who had been responding frustratively to artificial pressures and needs which did not correspond to the values which had brought them together in search for new structures and processes. The « organizing group » dissolved itself with statements such as: « At last we have a true sense of community » (3). The reasons of this decision are described elsewhere (see pages 271-276).

Strange Happenings

The previous section reflects only one level on which the Congress could be perceived. From first to last however it was the case that many strange happenings — perhaps the strangest being that it occurred despite the confusion from which it was born. The printed program carries the statement: « Newly arriving delegates all have stories of self-sacrifice, curiosity and faith in coming to Florence ». It was accepted by the original organizing group, which at times barely had funds for its own food, that: « Because of the ad hoc nature of the group of people attending on this Congress, and because of the spirit of the event itself, we have discovered that we could only receive that which we truly needed at any time and no more. These contributions of energy and vision, and gifts and loans of money were given by each person to another with a sense of personal trust and a hope for the common good ». At times participants seemed to have come together mysteriously and magically « because they thought they ought to be there », despite (or even because of) the lack of precision as to the nature of the Congress. The variety of participants was quite astounding.

There were: architects, physicians, healers, agriculturalists, artists, poets, dancers, biologists, disciples of a variety of sects and religions, psychologists, economists, educators, psychotherapists, historians, organic/whole food experts, intellectuals of a variety of persuasions (interested in sophisticated models of structures and processes), engineers, journalists, futurists, philosophers, company executives, home-makers, members of communities of various kinds (e.g. Findhorn in Scotland), students, etc. However, despite this variety, participants were accepted and assessed on the spot as individuals, irrespective of their origins, occupations and roles which were seldom identified. To add to the strangeness, there was an actor who (as part of the film production) demonstrated the role of the fool or clown in such gatherings. There was a street « soul dancer » (with a Havard degree) who functioned as « court jester » most admirably — clarifying brilliantly those points which occasionally needed emphasis, responsive to moments of tension and representative in many ways the soul of the Congress. (Has this ever before been permitted and welcomed in an international plenary assembly?) As might be expected there were also musicians, jugglers and magicians of various kinds. Needless to say the date of the event had been selected by astlogers, who were also present. The setting of the meeting also contributed to the atmosphere. It was opened in the Palazzo Vecchio, once the centre of government of the Florentine Republic and now the city hall. The Congress was held in the Forte Belvedere — a huge construction with walls many feet thick in a star formation, built by the Medici at the beginning of the 17th century. This is located on a direct line between the Medici palace of the Arcenti above Florence where Galileo carried out much of his work with the support of the Medici and the Duomo cathedral in the centre of the city. It is overlooked on the north side by the hill of Fiesole, a chief city of the Etruscan confederacy dating back to the 8th century B.C. — later superseded by Florence. The setting was used to point out the synthesis between the sciences and the arts which was a concern of the Congress. For the strange large-scale tubular « crystals » were created on the surface of the Fort to aid those interested in « infinitizing » their awareness (4). Collectively they bore a striking resemblance to the array of antennae at the Arcetri Astrophysical Observatory next to the Torre di Gallo.

In this atmosphere participants quickly established contacts based on mutual trust and affinity. The level of tolerance and mutual acceptance was necessarily high with such a variety of people and interests. In many cases this was reflected in casual gestures of affection between people who were virtual strangers by normal standards. This supportive environment made possible, for those who wished, to speak of their emotions or with tears in their eyes (even in plenary sessions). This occurred on a number of dramatic occasions and was accepted as a valid form of expression.

It is characteristic of the Congress that many participants experienced pain or discomfort in one form or another whilst there. Some had considerable transportation-related problems in getting there. Others suffered from odd physical pains. Many suffered emotional mental pain and frustration from the clash between their expectations and the realities of the Congress process. People were « crushed » and it was accepted by the core group that to succeed they would individually have to « get out of the way » of what needed to be achieved. Anyone who was clinging desperately to a particular structure or approach suffered. It was generally recognized that such experiences were beneficial. This meant that each had to justify his or her own continued presence and contribution, since the support of others seldom matched the discomfort experienced.

The Congress was also experienced by many as a process of joyful personal transformation, whether accomplished by strange coincidences, symbolic dreams, visions, or personal re-assessments. Quite unemotional people openly declared that it had provided them with some of the most meaningful experiences they had encountered. The variety of elements ensured that the Congress was a « complete experience » to the people attended it. There was a « spiritual focus »— at the core of the Congress. Many had brought them to Florence to « meet every taste, » and taking authority in a manner which prevented participants from acting in a fully responsible manner rather than as simple consumers of available « products ». Necessary administrative and other tasks were instigated in a very organic manner as the need was perceived by whoever in the core group was most sensitive to it as it emerged. Essential tasks of food preparation, cleaning, chair arrangement, registration, etc. were performed by volunteers or by some participants in repayment for a waived registration fee. The situation was dramatically changed on the evening of the fourth day at a core group meeting — held as a « fish-bowl event » in the middle of the plenary room (but with only 5-20 observers). After considerable discussion it was unanimously agreed that the meaning of the event in all its ramifications could best emerge if the core group ceased to « organize and schedule » and « step back » in order for the Congress to become aware of itself as a whole. Instead of scheduling events for the following day or thereafter, it was simply agreed that one person would « focalize » a general meeting, if sufficient participants gathered together in the plenary meeting room on the following morning. It was agreed that even the registration desk would be manned in an unscheduled manner by volunteers responding to the need. Such volunteers explained the change which had occurred in case participants did not wish to register. The workshop sign-up sheets were to be removed from the display wall. Once this decision was reached there was truly amazing expression of joy amongst those who had been responding frustratively to artificial pressures and needs which did not correspond to the values which had brought them together in search for new structures and processes. The « organizing group » dissolved itself with statements such as: « At last we have a true sense of community » (3). The reasons of this decision are described elsewhere (see pages 271-276).

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(3) The nature of the group's attitude to this decision at the critical moment it was taken is illustrated by the Zen tale told at that time: Three disciples of a Zen master were sent to explain the nature of a beautiful vase. The first and the second each absent a year and returned with complex statements — which were rejected. The third smashed the vase with one blow — and thus achieved « satori ». 


The fool, who was sitting beside the fire, heard these words, leapt to his feet, came before the King, and skipped and danced for glee, saying: "Lord King, so God save me, your adventures now begin, and often you will find them perilous and hard."

— Perceval, or the Story of the Grail

The fool: an enigmatic catalyst

The court jester, the clown, the fool or the buffoon, is a mythic figure representing the inversion of the powers of the king (as the possessor of supreme powers) — or as his alter ego. He is therefore often the victim chosen in folklore as the substitute or foil for the king in rites whereby the people respond frankly and unceremoniously to such powers.

Court jesters were first recorded in the courts of the Egyptian pharaohs and were in vogue up until the 18th century in European courts, salons and taverns. They were often physically mishappen, if not also psychically disturbed, ideally they were a powerful reminder of the distortion of the human condition — more immediate than the photographs disseminated via the media of today. Additionally, due to the freedom from censure and responsibility for their actions which they were accorded, they were able to mirror, parody and mimic court situations in such a way as to bring out truths which would otherwise be collectively and carefully ignored. They were often masters of song and dance, and could be a dramatic foil to pomp, superficiality and falsehood of any kind. As an ambiguous and often androgynous figure, the jester could function as a powerful social catalyst — for good or for ill, depending upon the response of those by whom he was surrounded.

The fool is an enigmatic symbol of the point of crisis when the normal or conscious appears to become perverted or infirm, and in order to regain health and well-being is obliged to turn to the dangerous, the irrational, the unconscious and the abnormal. As such, the fool is to be found on the fringes of all orders and systems, outside all conventional categories, processes and social rules. He is the bridge between the conscious and the unconscious (and between the attributes of the right and left hemispheres of the brain) — a reminder that, after having failed in our effort to order and understand the universe in the light of our intellect and instinct, there nevertheless remains another way.

Eliminating the jester from the court is as risky as allowing him to play his role. For, if "foolishness" is not given a channel through which to express itself, it seeks its own channel anyway. Parliamentary and international assemblies, particularly those in which each is conscious of the high purpose and seriousness of his role, run a considerable risk of incurring distortion into their proceedings and results because of an inability to accept what a jester would reveal. (Political cartoons offer a partial remedy, but they lack the significance of being accepted as part of the proceedings and thus have little effect on them.)

It requires greater maturity on the part of all participants, especially the chairperson and principal speakers, to play their parts in the face of such instant feedback. In the absence of children at international assemblies, who can say whether our international emperors wear any clothes?

Joker: messenger from the unconscious

The "Court" Jester and "Foolishness"

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However, it is viewed, the Congress contained many of the elements from which myths are made and in some ways engaged itself in a myth-making process — if only because of the many ways in which it can be described and the lack of any written record.

**Harmonies of Dramatic Process**

One contextual thread which was voiced on a number of occasions was that the Congress as a whole was a transformative process. In fact the stages of this process, derived from a synthesis presented there (5), were over-printed on the program distributed to participants. The succession of phases were labelled: accretive, replicative, mutualistic and transformative with each blending into the next over 2-3 day periods within the 10 days of the Congress. And indeed, even in the depths of crisis, it did appear as though the process was "on schedule". (In the accretive phase there is an accumulation of elements with similar characteristics. In the replicative phase, there is growth by influencing other elements to take on the form of the initiator. In the mutual growth phase these is reciprocal interaction between the elements. The transformative phase establishes a new system of order from which the sequence can be repeated at a new level.)

But aside from the intellectual overview of the process, there was also an understanding among many that the moments of drama, of takeover attempts by different individuals and factions, of expressions of anger and mutual accusation, of leadership abdication, of ultimatums, etc. were all integral elements in a real and meaningful process. As the proceedings evolved, it was quite beautiful to observe how "incompatible" factions in the Congress played off against each other or united in strange and moving harmonies. This occurs to some extent in most meetings but the variety of modes of expression considered valid on this occasion was unique.

A plenary session which can move fluidly between: verbal exchange (whether intellectual or emotive), affective display, physical expression (as dance, movement or mime), ceremony and meditation, at any appropriate moment, is rich in dramatic possibilities particularly with a "court jester" as catalyst. It is only in terms of dramatic process and interplay that excessive enthusiasm or negativity could be appropriately handled and channelled by the Congress as a whole — for the structures which are conventionally expected to handle such energies were themselves called into question, constantly modified and subjected to criticism. The collective challenge was to refine and improve the drama from its crude initial forms to one which could blend together all the elements present into a new and meaningful whole.

This should not be understood to imply that people and factions were playing artificial games with one another or that there was a lack of discipline of any kind. The dynamics were "for real" and reflected attitudes that were sincerely held or genuinely felt. Tears (but not hysteria), a sense of despair, frustration and exhaustion were all frequent phenomena — and some left when they could stand no more. It was however accepted by others that the Congress process should provide a "crucible" within which the variety of elements could be blended and moulded into a "chalice" as an expression of the whole.

Feeding this collective awareness of a dramatic process were suggestions made by a number of people — towards the end of the Congress — that the process bore some resemblance to a breathing cycle (inspiration, expiration), to a succession of birth contractions, or to a nuptial ritual between "yin" and "yang" forces. There was a widely shared belief that the Congress was a birth process although any focus on what was to be born was avoided — an attitude of expectancy was created.

Another understanding, shared to some degree, was that the Congress process was a double reflection: (a) of processes between similar factions, forces and viewpoints in the outside world, and (b) of processes and attitudes held in different ways within each individual present, especially including oneself. To observe the process was therefore to observe both oneself and society as a whole. Any struggle for a greater harmony in one was seen as reflected in the others and reinforced by them. This made the Congress experience triply significant as one responded to the battle and balance between the old and new forms and contending forces. It was suggested that the transformation of the Congress could then also be seen as a transformative process for oneself and for society as a whole.

**Here-and-now Focus**

It was also very characteristic of many who made the Congress happen that there was a definitive willingness to focus on the here-and-now. An extreme instance of this was the number of people who had made no personal or professional plans for the period immediately following the Congress. They had risked much to make something happen in the present.

As the Congress evolved and conventional planning was abandoned, participants were obliged to focus on a moment-by-moment reality. New program elements were scheduled at very short notice in response to the needs of the moment. All the usual features of a congress were constantly called into question, whether deliberately or through the lack of importance attached to them. Participants were encouraged to be self-reliant, to improvise and to take initiative if there was something they specially wished to achieve (e.g. give a workshop, show slides, etc.). In such a context it may well be asked what prevented the Congress from falling apart (or exploding!). The answer lies in the level of mutual trust, whether intuitive or affective, which by-passed individual differences and the lack of explicit consensus.

(For a detailed report on the consequences of the organizing group's decision to stand back, and on the process evolved by the plenary group, see pages 271-276).
Emergence of integrative processes in a self-reflective assembly

Introduction

At a congress with rather unusual characteristics (see description, page 266) the organizing group decided to stand back and thus oblige the participants in plenary to make the quantum leap in attitude from being there to be served passively by the organizing group to being, making and evolving the Congress themselves as a conscious whole. The consequences of this dramatic decision and the processes which were elaborated in plenary are described here.

Self-reflective plenary: Unity

This section reports on the consequences of the decision by the organizing group to « stand back » and allow the Congress to take care of itself. On the morning of the fifth day, participants gathered in a plenary session for a discussion which lasted some nine hours. The early hours of the discussion were filled with exchanges and complaints, often bitter and emotional.

One major theme was whether the Congress should be tightly structured with a significant proportion of the time given to lectures by the key resource people, and with much of the remainder devoted to workshops by other resource people. A strong response to this was that it amounted to a « consumer » approach - denying the importance of participants as resource persons in their own right, and reinforcing conventional structures which it was the purpose of the Congress to call into question. The point was whether the participants had come for a safe, low-risk, pre-packaged « super-market » experience (1) — which was often available in their home towns, in books or at other events - or whether they had come to work collectively towards new approaches, however painful the experience.

During this session, for the first time, people stopped holding back critical comments in public. Things that needed to be said were said and the responses, often very moving, resulted in integration of the group rather than fragmentation. There emerged a sense of shared reality - even if that reality was painful. It became less appropriate for a participant to stress his or her personal wants and frustrations rather than those of the group as a whole, or some significant part thereof.

The session itself was held under considerable pressure from those who believed that « talking » itself was a sterile activity and a waste of time. Frequent proposals were made to have lectures or workshops, to switch to an alternative mode of expression (e.g. dancing), or to counteract the analytical divisiveness by affective displays or meditation. One response to these was that they amounted to « cop-outs » and an inability to face up to the collective reality and the tensions inherent in it. Another, in the case of workshops, was that they fragmented the group as a whole and prevented it from coming to any understanding of its raison d'etre or how its action could be improved. Handling differences by dividing into smaller groups is a standard practice in society - it results in mutual alienation and the inter-group conflict with which the Congress was concerned in attempting to reflect a greater whole. Another response, in the case of alternative modes of expression, was each such mode alienated some of the participants without responding to the problems of the whole. The paradox that they amounted to « cop-outs » was recognized. The space was a vacuum to be filled with any kind of activity, sometimes to constitute itself, short of achieving the same objective itself - in the course of which it could have extended its sense of « we-ness ». But if that were so, the very state of affairs, general mood, etc. there was a good chance of total disintegration occasioned by the general unwieldiness of the plenary mode of functioning. There was a good chance of total disintegration occasioned by the general unwieldiness of the plenary mode of functioning. There was a good chance of total disintegration occasioned by the general unwieldiness of the plenary mode of functioning. There was a good chance of total disintegration occasioned by the general unwieldiness of the plenary mode of functioning.

The group was prepared to ask what « we » wanted and why « we » were there. It was recognized that the Congress was now on unknown territory since no diverse international gathering of such size had placed itself at risk in this way before (2). The group felt it had to feel its way forward, improvising at each stage, to see whether anything creative could emerge from the process. For some experienced congress-goers this was an excitingly unique experience.

The sense of immediacy and moment-by-moment reality provided a « collective central space » - an eye in the hurricane - from which the Congress processes could be sensed. To the extent that the space was a vacuum of non-action, there was great pressure to fill it with any kind of activity.

The nine hour session terminated without however taking responsibility for the following day and without a sense of the possible evolution of the Congress. For some this continued refusal to confront the collective reality - despite what had been achieved - represented merely a further stage in the process.

(1) International congresses have always been recognized as intimately related to travel and tourism. The point has never however been made that since the congress program items themselves - panels, presentations, etc. - constitute packaged « trips » (to use the jargon of the alternative culture) for participants, then the conventional congress can itself be conceived as a collection of intellectual and emotional tours amongst which participants are free to choose. A congress may thus be seen to be related to the packaged tour industry both in reality and metaphorically.

(2) There is of course much experience of the behaviour of small groups (6-15 people) in unstructured situations, since this is an integral part of sensitivity training, encounter groups, and the like, in which many of those present were quite experienced.

(3) Response to the above from the focal person of that group: « It was impressive that we demonstrated so much larger than « good feeling » and « we-ness » to have resulted from the previous day I don't deny that we thereby removed some of the creative tension from the plenary, nor that it grasped hungrily for something resembling a programme by which to constitute itself, short of achieving the same objective itself - in the course of which it could have extended its sense of « we-ness ». But I feel that given the prevailing state of affairs, general mood, etc. there was a good chance of total disintegration occasioned by the general unwieldiness of the plenary mode of functioning. I also felt that it was important to clear the air of expectations, resentment and frustration, so we could get on to dealing with higher orders of substantive integration - which is what I felt began to happen two days later. »
Reaction and Premature Synthesis
The tension of collective self-awareness and the space which it created could not be maintained. On the sixth day, as a reaction, the program was tightly constrained and continuously scheduled (by a small group which took this role upon itself without the general consent) — lectures in the morning and early afternoon, followed by workshops (3). The latter were however held in the same large room to avoid the sense of fragmentation, and then reported back together as a plenary assembly. The sessions were a relief to many who felt that a meaningful synthesis had been achieved between structure and process. The general atmosphere was very positive. The workshops contributed to this sentiment until the reportback procedure highlighted how unearth-shaking were the insights which emerged — despite the assembled expertise — and how the problem of interrelating them meaningfully and usefully remained to be confronted. It was then agreed that the experimental approach of the previous day should be continued in plenary. Despite the consensus of the previous day, a small group again took the initiative to schedule (the Sunday) with a morning plenary session of meditative celebration, poetry reading and Renaissance dance. After a short period this was abruptly broken up by a series of protests which re-opened the issues which had been raised on the fifth day. A very powerful debate ensued with many eloquent speeches. The first point made was that whatever its aesthetic, inspirational or celebratory appeal, the proposed program reinforced attitudes which had already been proved inadequate to the challenges of the times. As such it was in many respects a hindrance in that most of what could be learnt from such activities had already been learnt. A second point was that time spent collectively in respectably absorbing further inspiration, or insightful information, diverted concentration and effort from actually engaging with the first, length from the second, etc.) and react to it in different ways: (i) adapt himself to it (if need be further develop), do the opposite, become dissimilar lest or something else (something 'unheard of') (ii) if the musical material is completely substituted by the description of the possibility arising from the reactions of the performers to their neighbours. (3) See footnote previous page. (4) Lionel Kreeger (Ed). The Large Group; dynamics and therapy. London, Constable, 1975 (summarizes current understanding but with apparently little relevance to a conference-type situation).
sonality within the larger group and the interaction between such smaller groups creates many problems and creative possibilities within the larger group. The unexplored question is whether any of the small group techniques can be used within a large group to promote the transformation of its constituent smaller groups (namely small group transformation replaces the usual goal of individual transformation — and the group consciousness sought is an awareness of the larger group as a whole).

One small group technique, itself a synthesis of methods used in China and the USA, was adapted as follows by the plenary session after some discussion.

Round I: Some 24 smaller groups were distinguished as contributing significantly to the dynamics of the larger group. Provisional labels were made out with identifying key terms (see box). These were laid out in a circle within the concentric circles of participant chairs. Participants were asked to determine with which groups they felt some special affinity (5).

Those identifying with each group in turn were then asked to stand up and a spokesperson for the affinity group was asked:

— What were the special qualities of that affinity group and what did it contribute to the larger group as a whole?

— What were the major challenges and areas of the affinity group to improve its contribution to the larger group as a whole?

Other members of the affinity group could supplement the responses to these questions.

This process gave all concerned a better awareness of the distinct contributions made by each affinity group and encouraged each group to clarify the nature of its shortcomings.

This Round was successfully completed by the plenary group. It was clear that some of the affinity groups were not especially aware of their shortcomings. Some of them also considered themselves as the "most important" of the affinity groups.

Round II: The exercise is repeated in a second round in which a spokesperson for each affinity group informs each other group of how they are each perceived by the spokesperson's group. In other words the spokesperson answers the above two questions for each other affinity group, identifying the qualities and shortcomings of each.

This process gives each affinity group a greater awareness of which of its qualities are appreciated within the larger group. It also exposes it, gently, to feedback on the matters on which it is insensitive (and to which it is never likely to be exposed under normal circumstances). It helps to clear many of the blockages to inter-group interaction within the larger group. And it does it by providing a supportive context for exchanges in which a larger group are conventionally at the primitive level of "Our group the best... Your group very bad" (as had already been experienced in plenary exchanges). There was unfortunately no time to undertake this round within the plenary session although it would, seemingly, have provided the needed breakthrough to a new level of integration within the larger group — one which would be respectful of diversity (6).

Round III: Further rounds were envisaged in which affinity groups exchanged roles to enable them to obtain a greater understanding of the domain in which each other group operated. (In the case of individuals, one form of this technique is known as psycho-drama).

Round IV: Some of the above affinity groups, which are most evident in the initial dynamics may, after several rounds, prove to be somewhat superficial. The exercise can then be repeated by the original media group and with the original labels. The labels could have been used to provide a new level of integration within the larger group — one which would provide the needed breakdown to a new level of integration within the larger group — one which would be respectful of diversity. A participant could well be part of several such groups.

Affinity groups at the Congress

1. Original organizing group
2. Structure-oriented group (i.e. favoring adherence to a predetermined programme, with emphasis on lectures and workshops by key resource people)
3. Process-oriented group (i.e. favoring flexibility, with emphasis on all participants as resource people)
4. "Super-class" resource people (i.e. those who participated with the intention of giving a lecture)
5. "Middle-class" resource people (i.e. those who participated with the intention of giving a workshop)
6. Lecture attenders (i.e. those specially in favour of lectures by key resource people)
7. Workshop attenders (i.e. those specially in favour of workshops)
8. Detached observers (i.e. those uncommitted to the ends of the Congress)
9. Floaters (i.e. those drawn to a variety of experiences)
10. Movie makers (i.e. the group producing the film on the Congress)
11. Visionary instigators (i.e. the group concerned to ensure that something new and significant emerged from the Congress)
12. Psychotherapists and the like (i.e. those concerned with personal and spiritual development through some form of counselling)
13. Movement, dance and performer group (i.e. those oriented towards non-verbal expression and its personal significance for group integration)
14. Whole-earth, organic food/health group
15. Mediator group
16. Intellectual modellers (i.e. those interested in the possibilities and fruits of conceptual synthesis)
17. Non-anglophone group (i.e. those who were handicapped by an inadequate knowledge of English)
18. "American" group (i.e. 51 participants travelling as a group and isolated in a distant hotel)
19. Kitchen voluntary worker group
20. North-American Indian group (i.e. those wanting the Congress to act in response to the native American crisis)
21. "Here-and-now" group (i.e. those wanting to act immediately and to stop talking)
22. "Here-and-now" group (i.e. those impressed by the immediacy and righteousness of the present and the lack of pressure to act)
23. Artists and visualizers
24. Educator group

(5) A participant could well be part of several such groups.

(6) Possibly some preliminary exercise could have been used to reduce the number of labelled groups (e.g. to 5-15, corresponding to the viable number of individuals in small group processes). The labels could have been located in relation to the chairs in which each small group was located, provided that participants could move from group to group during the process.

(8) Each small group could collectively re-assess its identity, as symbolized by the terms on the label. Ideally the label should be revised, possibly to include negatively loaded descriptors to its negative characteristics are highlighted by the process in the larger group. Labels may not be necessary, however.
pealed with new affinity groups considered to be more fundamental or more relevant to the collective purpose of the whole as it emerges. At this stage the pattern of tensions between the affinity groups becomes a collective reality which can be worked with to stabilize disequilibria and unfocused exchanges within the larger whole. This procedure represents a compromise both between small and plenary group processes and between verbal, analytical and experiential processes. Experiential skills previously only applied to small groups are applied both within the affinity groups and within the larger whole — in this way feeding back specialized expertise normally restricted to small groups. Ideally the attempt could be made to apply a wide variety of small group skills to the larger whole with the object of progressively transforming the relationships between affinity groups within it. Answering the direct question of what any affinity group contributes to the plenary group ensures a collectively focused awareness of the varied nature of such contributions and their special relevance to the dynamics of the whole. This eliminates the triviality of token contributions normally characteristic of small group feedback to a plenary body unable and unwilling to integrate such input in any meaningful manner. The plenary group in this way engages in a «self-healing» process (which, as it was expressed at the Congress, «helps to get the crap out»).

It is well-recognized in psychotherapy that the ability to permit and to handle negative feedback is an essential indicator of the maturity of any individual and equally of any group. By permitting such feedback the process facilitates the maturation of the affinity groups (7) and of the larger whole. A great deal of creative energy emerges from an appropriate stance in response to negativity or, more presicely, in responding appropriate stance in response to negativity tending tendency. And essentially this is what the process achieves, namely a dynamic equilibrium between a variety of polar opposites — a balance of dualities which defines a central space or position from which the group can act creatively, with focused energy, as an integrated self-reflective whole.

Conceptual Synthesis

A deliberate effort was made by the initial organizing group to use the occasion of the Congress to bring into focus the interrelationships between a number of unique and little-known conceptual models. These «universal» models are characterized by the wide range of phenomena which they attempt to encompass and the manner in which they draw insights from a broad range of disciplines, often including natural and social sciences and even arts as well as sciences. Some of the originators of such models were present at the Congress, two were directly represented, and others were collectively represented by people working on the interrelationships and isomorphisms between such models (a preoccupation which, unfortunately, the model-builders themselves usually do not share for obvious reasons). The last occasion on which such a synthesis was attempted was in 1969-1971 in association with some members of the Society for General Systems Research. The models were presented in lectures and workshops and their synthesis is partly documented in the Congress film (see footnote 1).

The significance of this initiative is that (a) the Congress provided a forum within which such syntheses could be presented, (b) it ensured a unique confrontation between such intellectual approaches and the affective, artistic, spiritual and experiential approaches hitherto characteristic of the «New Age movement», and (c) applications of two of the models were used to provide integrative guidelines for the Congress process itself, thus linking theory to social reality.

Conclusion

A congress of this kind is many things to many people. Many descriptions, evaluations, explanations and interpretations can be projected on to it — and this document may be more selective and biased than others. Only the future may be able to tell, from the consequences of the Congress, what weight to give to particular factors. But having participated in the event and its processes, a significant number of experienced meeting-goers now recognize that many conventional meetings are a sterile, unproductive bore in comparison. Summarizing its unique achievements, the following may be noted:

1. Individuals of a very wide range of preoccupations and persuasions (both famous and otherwise) were brought together, by-passed their usual lack of mutual credibility, and worked together in a mutually beneficial manner. A unique «space» was thus provided for incompatible elements to interact integratively.

2. The organization of the Congress was self-consistent in responding within itself to the issues raised by the need for new social structures. The Congress was self-organized, participant-run and staffed. Elitism was severely restricted by the Congress processes without destroying orderly process. Participants were prepared to place everything at risk in order to ensure the emergence of more appropriate modes of organization. The Congress demonstrated that such modes can emerge with direct consequences for the smooth organization of its own processes.

3. Resource people, and those anxious to structure other people's awareness, were placed on the defensive. They were obliged to seek ways of making their contribution to the whole without distorting the collective process for the purposes of individual ego-nourishment. A new mode of congress behaviour was clarified.

4. A core group of people, who had personally risked most, were taken by the process they initiated through a very rapid process of transformation as a group. Many other participants reported significant personal transformation. The value of the process, as a «complete experience», whether personally or collectively, is the justification for holding the Congress.

5. What was achieved was done with a derisory amount of funding and a preponderance of quite «ordinary people». Ironically, it could probably not have been achieved with generous funding or with «better qualified» or «more effective» individuals. (It was the well-armoured dinosaurs that failed to survive the evolutionary crisis, not the mammals scurrying between their feet).

6. A triple synthesis was effected (with joy): (a) in physically gathering together and blending harmoniously a uniquely diverse group (point 1), (b) in engaging experimentally in a process it originated which brought into focus and balanced the dualistic forces within the group, thus opening the way to structured development of large group collective self-awareness, and (c) in interrela-
ting a variety of conceptual models and demonstrating their use in the Congress own processes.

A creative impetus was established in many of those most centrally involved whose consequences may well be evident shortly in a variety of forms, notably innovative social organization.

As a contrast to its successes, the failures were mainly associated with the time taken to benefit from the preliminary stages of the Congress process and with resistance to that process. Had less time been spent on the early difficulties, the Congress would have had more time to build on the point of balance it reached in its closing period. Fewer people would have been unnecessarily hurt. In addition, part of the synthesis achieved was implicit rather than explicit because of the time factor.

The challenge raised by the Congress is how to build on its achievement — given that part of its success derived from the variety of opposing tendencies represented (as a result of the confusion surrounding it prior to the event). Could such an event be repeated, how, and by whom? — given that part of its success also derived from the ability of the organizers to terminate their responsibility.

Finally, the real test of a Congress on social transformation is its ability to transform its own structures and processes — using itself as a laboratory — and to provide meaningful personal transformation for those who participate.

Failing which the Congress resembles the preacher in the following tale:

In a small Welsh village the preacher great length on the evils of alcohol consumption. The preacher himself, however, was often to be seen incapacitated by alcohol although none of the village adults dared to comment. One little boy did ask about the seeming inconsistency, however. The preacher responded: "My boy it is very simple: I am a signpost but not the way."

Many Congresses produce splendid signposts (recommendations, declarations, reports etc.) Maybe this Congress established a way.

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**Speculative Postscript: Where's the Cathedral?**

It was suggested above that a purpose of the Congress was through its labyrinth as through the dense positions of a to build a cathedral rather than function as a signpost, or as a vehicle for social transformation. The psycho-social pit it was a success where one main feature was that some effective internal sense of a society (such as the pop culture in the 1960s) may be built in a more conscious way. However, the following argument does open up some of the contradictions.

What is a cathedral? The gothic cathedrals were conceived as an enclosed space to facilitate human transformation within the community. The architectural elements were deliberately selected and harmonically placed in order to catalyze this process — in whatever manner people wished to respond to it.

The design deliberately incorporated different attitudes and experiences (corresponding to stages in transformation) typically such cathedrals had, two towers at the entrance to symbolize the balance between the primary activities such as the maze itself was designed with the goal of balance. The major indication of balance through corresponding images and the corresponding labyrinth was large circular labyrinth being a focus of transformation.

So what has this to do with the Congress? It can be seen that the many signs and symbols of thought that make up the social product in various wholes though they have not an axial symmetry lack precision and are limited to gross structures with few axes of symmetry, if any. Sociality is only provided organically and occasionally communal celebrations and is poorly reflected in permanent structures. The energies the society disperses to a focused and unfocused.

The process did however progress to a level, namely one in which a consciously recognized unity through its dialectic and through the harmony of the interplay between the organizational agency with the consequent influx of creative activity (with the loss of point of balance). This led to the understanding of the labyrinth. The maze window and its relation to the labyrinth beautifully illustrates this level of perception and the manner in which it clarifies the nature of the transformative space. The corresponding physical and architectural system carefully engineered (in terms of their axial symmetry) to reflect the ever-varying unidirectional and interlocking patterns and symmetries of community and the constructional hierarchies which can be created. Both from the time of the cathedral(9)

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(9) The symmetrical and interdirectional elements in the diagram shown on following page by Cribb and Clark, is based on a book by Cribb and Clark and was published in 1976.
Although the organic, wholistic circle is beautifully blended architecturally into the rational square (e.g. the gothic arch), this is only achieved by the skillful use of compression between structural members. The structure as a whole is dependent on the external overriding tensile force of gravity (or authority) to prevent it falling apart. It is not structurally self-dependent and its elements lack the freedom of tensile interplay which would permit the structure to respond appropriately to forces (or shocks) from any direction. Such structures are "natural" only to a limited degree because they fail to make use of constructional principles inherent in plants and animals, namely the appropriate balance between structural tension and compression — an animal can be rotated flexibly into any position without falling apart, but not a cathedral, or social organizations built on the same hierarchical principles.

Also active at the Congress however, were those working on isomorphic conceptual models and the synthesis they represent. At least two of these give rise to two-dimensional structures which were a focus for group activity. The question then is, are there new kinds of structure which can be used as a basis for new kinds of architecture, whether physical or social? To be superior to conventional architecture, they need to:

- require fewer materials
- be easier to construct
- be more stable under a wider range of forces
- be more isomorphic with corresponding conceptual structures of philosophic and social significance
- correspond more closely to the harmonies and economies of natural structure.

One set of structures presented, which fulfills these conditions, is known under the name "tensegrity structures". They are best known through their architectural application in geodesic domes, although as usually seen they disguise the important principles underlying their design which are relevant to this argument and to the elaboration of corresponding social structures.

Returning to the Congress, aside from the limitations of the rosette window already mentioned, the problem is that the interplay between the factional tendencies is obviously much more complex than can be adequately represented in a two-dimensional display. Such complexity can only be "captured" in a structure of matching complexity which does justice to the variety of interaction patterns. Tensegrity structures lend themselves admirably to this.

Briefly, their advantages include: an elegant relationship between tension and compression elements, a more elegant solution to the relationship between the spherical and the linear, omnidirectional stability, and multiple axes and planes of symmetry. Translating these advantages into psycho-social terms, the interacting tendencies in a large group (for example) are balanced much more elegantly. The transformative space defined between the dualities is now focused at the centre of a sphere (rather than between rows of vertical pillars), whose shape is maintained by the dualities and by the network of forces which hold them in symmetrical relationship to one another, however they are oriented. Order is inherent and not externally imposed. Duality is balanced and transcended in structure which lends themselves to rational analysis whilst exemplifying the wholistic dimension by progressions through a complete scale of such structures. Symbols of appropriate psycho-cultural significance can be associated with them and as such they can be understood as precisely designed aerials tapping into archetypal energies. The key question is whether these clues can be used in practice to design new kinds of psycho-social structures which are more adequate to the needs of the times. A tensegrity structure could, for example, have been used to clarify the harmony within the plenary's diversity and to facilitate understanding of how energy could be moved, focused and used within the Congress in response to different initiatives.

As to the cathedral, the Congress did not build one for they have largely served their function and a new type of structure is urgently required. The Congress did however create a central transformative space analogous to that in cathedrals and it did bring into focus the nature and significance of some new structures — perhaps best illustrated by a micro-organism of the order radiolaria (above), or by the concept of nested tensegrity structures. This establishes a basis from which the reality of the corresponding psycho-social structures can be explored.

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(9) Class One of all history's domes is comprised of the hundreds of millennia of old upside-down baskets which include the later evolution of baskets into boats and the re-upside-dowing, once more, of boats to form the roofs of community meeting places and its later derivative the cathedral. R Buckminster Fuller, Ideas and Intelligences, Prentice Hall, 1963.

(10) A first step towards exploring this possibility is described in an article in this issue, pages 248.

Labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral Drawing: Keith Critchlow (see footnote 8)

A lesson in structure from one species of radiolaria
Collective learning from calls for global action

This document was originally prepared for the planning meeting in January 1981 of the Planetary Initiative for the World We Choose (described in this issue, pages 7-10, and 11-14). Despite its many limitations, it identifies concerns which need to be borne in mind when reflecting on the merits of any new proposal for action at this time. The proposals emerging from the recent Casa­blanca Forum of NGOs (November 1981) are a case in point (see pages 18-25), as is the Club of Rome’s new Forum Humanum project, and the Stuttgart proposal (pages 29-33). The World Forum of Transnational Associations (Brussels, 1980) must of course also be seen in this light.

Introduction

Calls for global action are much to be welcomed in this time of uncertainty. The following comments attempt to focus on the significance of the ever-present gap between the vision underlying such proposals and the reality of the outcome. Given that the past two decades have seen the birth and demise of many global programmes and campaigns, are there lessons which can usefully be kept in mind when assessing new calls for action. Why is it that initiators of new calls for action pay little attention to the weaknesses of past efforts? How can blindspots be uncovered to give greater strength to such initiatives as they emerge? How can we learn from the inadequacies of efforts in the past? The following points constitute a rudimentary checklist of points which merit reflection in designing and responding to any global call for action, particularly one based on the energies of grassroots participation and mobilization of “we the peoples”.

Recent examples

2. In what way will an initiative enable us to move significantly beyond initiatives of the past? Consider the following examples:

2.1. World Symposium on Humanity (1979): setting aside the personality and financial problems, in what way will the initiative attempt to achieve more than the Symposium? The Symposium failed in many ways to provide any integration of the energies represented. To what extent was it more than a fun experience with some audiovisual highs?

2.2. Toronto World Future Congress (1980) (Theme: Thinking globally, acting locally): this Congress brought together a large number of highly qualified people.

But no coherent message or course of action emerged. It was an idea supermarket for “future consumers”.

2.3. Findhorn One Earth Gatherings (annual) (Theme: Vision for the 80s). These gatherings mobilize 200-300 people every year. The meeting process (speakers, groups) generates much enthusiasm.

Whilst this must have many effects when the individuals return to their own communities, it is far from clear that considerably increasing the numbers so effected would constitute a significant breakthrough.

Again the problems of moving to a higher level of integration are avoided, as are the significant differences of opinion of those present, whether as resource people or humble participants.

2.4. UNINGO Forums: such events have been held in parallel with recent UN Conferences (Vienna, Rome, Vancouver, Stockholm). They bring together many organizations for lengthy debates and informal discussions. The question is whether, knowing the results achieved, the organizations would have committed the resources to participating. The resolutions and declarations of such events are certainly of debateable significance.

2.7 Many academic (WOMP, Aspen, Pugwash, UNU/GPID, World University, WAAS, etc.) or governmental meetings have been held which attempt to come to terms with the issues covered by the planned initiative. These responses have been inadequate to the challenge, or it would not be necessary to envisage this initiative. But why have they been inadequate? What are the lessons to be learnt?

2.8. International campaigns: Many information campaigns have been tied to (U.N.) international “decades” “years” (e.g. children, environment, etc.). These mobilize many groups and coalitions. In what way have these been inadequate to the challenge?

Problems of emphasis

3. In the light of the initiative prospectus as it now stands, each of the above could be seen by its proponents of having closely related, if not identical, intentions. What are the possible dimensions of the planned event in the light of such past exercises:

3.1. Inspiration: Namely the necessary use of “heavies” (super-star speakers) to attract people to the event and its programme and to establish its significance.

Problem: such people may be encouraged to take up much programme time, even though there is little to say that is not already available (e.g. in their books or in reports of previous meetings). Little attention is given to what people can do once they have been stimulated to an appropriate level of enthusiasm. Little attention is given to the lack of integration (if not con-
3.2. Education: Namely to help those who participate to achieve some new level of understanding of the complex of issues with which the world is confronted.

Problem: this can absorb much programme time. The question is whether the focus on learning is not a disguise for inability to focus collectively on the fact that there is a marked inability to act even when everyone has learnt the same lessons.

3.3. Information exchange: Namely exchange of ideas, opportunities, contacts, etc.

Problem: this very beneficial process is usually creatively haphazard and it is questionable whether it has led in the past to working methods adequate to the challenge. Its very nature it can at best lead to a low-level organic integration.

3.4. Celebration and expression: It is entirely appropriate that the event should have a celebratory character to mark the achievement of a certain moment of integration. Enjoyment and expression of relationship are essential oils for integration processes.

Problem: Celebration can easily be used as a disguise for individual and collective inability to achieve anything beyond the event. The more successful the celebration, the more successful the disguise: a celebration of inability to act.

3.5. Planning and coordination: Efforts may be made to develop ways of linking together groups and individuals for future action.

Problem: Coordinating bodies are short-lived (or out-live their usefulness) and are too frequently "letterhead" or "talk-shop" devices. Networks are frequently exercises in optimism which fail to work or attract commitment for any length of time.

3.6. Vision and design: Such events often aspire to envision and design the future.

Problem: the vision, if any, tends to remain at the level of enthusiasm and is not confronted with constraints essential to the design process from which action blueprints can emerge. If designs do emerge, they tend to be simplistic and to reflect the views of the self-selected group which worked on them.

3.7. Declarations: Efforts may be made to focus the collective intentions into the form of a declaration.

Problem: the preparation and discussion of such a document tends to consume considerable time. Little is heard of the declaration after the event and it seldom provides the platform for the collective action originally intended. The same is true for the written report or audio-visual record of such events.

3.8. Public impact: A main purpose of the event may be media impacts to inform the general public.

Problem: the compromises made to this end distort the programme to the point where little may be achieved in reality amongst the participants. The event becomes a symbol of what might be - without facing up to the construction of the steps to get there.

3.9. Creativity: stress may be placed on stimulating the emergence of creative ideas with which to respond to the challenge.

Problem: Whilst creative ideas may emerge, there is seldom a satisfactory receptacle within which they are received. It is usually the case of seeds falling upon stony ground.

3.10 Action: It may be hoped to use the event to do something on the spot as opposed to talking about doing it, or about the need for others to do it.

Problem: Action undertaken without reflection is usually of short-lived or highly localized significance. This may be an adequate symbol (despite the intention) but does not have the wide-ranging impact desired except in the case of highly dramatic actions.

3.11. Conceptualization: It may be hoped to clarify intellectually the interdisciplinary guidelines for possible action.

Problem: Emphasis on the analytical intellectual mode can decay swiftly into a debate between opposing schools of thought. Little attention is given to the problems of synthesis. And when interdisciplinarity is an explicit concern, the consequence is often merely a euphoric exchange of ideas at a level of superficiality which guarantees that any disagreements will be quickly disguised and avoided in order to create the impression that the initiative has come realistically to grips with the central issues. There is little record of any concrete action emerging from such exchanges in the past.

3.12 Spiritual invocation: It may be considered important to introduce a spiritual dimension in order to invoke new insight.

Problem: those in favour of this emphasis tend to consider it of such significance that only incidental attention needs to be given to other issues and notably to concrete steps towards action.

4. The cautionary remarks above can be considered in relation to:

6. The present world crisis is such that those who are prepared to respond to it should not be called upon to waste their energies on unfruitful activities. The challenge lies in finding ways to weave together the very different energies which are needed in order to constitute a viable new form.

Past experience of still-born and failed initiatives indicates how little we consciously "know" about this process of engendering a new departure. It may well be that the collective process is a perfectly natural one - parents after all do not have to be concerned with the bio-chemistry of fertilization. But there are certain preconditions for dependence on nature as any farmer knows - bulls and cows frequently have a rather fuzzy (if not comical) idea about what is involved. Is it possible that the fundamental process of "presenting" and "addressing" is poorly understood, if at all, in the way in which configurations of groups constitute themselves in relation to the complex "problem-mandala" of their preoccupations?

7. In many domains (e.g. music) tangible changes in forms have been the precursors of analogous changes in under-
standing of psycho-social reality. Could it be that the ignorance and imbalances characteristic of past relationships between the sexes have lessons to offer concerning errors in the collective approach to engendering viable new psycho-social forms? It is only very recently that sex education has made any inroads on the, often quant, misinformation and further «dirty» secrets by which the physical process has been surrounded - at the price of untold misery and disillusionment to those initially caught in the compensating glamour. Is it not possible that many social change initiatives are in effect couched in terms which reinforce an analogously quaint misunderstanding of what is really involved in the gadgety process of engendering new psycho-social forms?

More troubling still, it is only recently that some religions have started to release the sexual process from being an unfortunate, if necessary, manifestation of the beast in man. Is it possible that there is still a similarly unfortunate confusion blocking understanding of the analogous psycho-social process?

Such misinformation can only lead to a double standard characteristic of Victorian England, for example. In the prudery of the salon, babies «appeared» as a result of an unmentionable process clouded in euphemism. Complementing this, social change was accomplished and enforced at a distance by brutality and bloodshed. Is it possible that such a polarity now persists between the artificially «heady» debates of (international) meetings, complemented by the violent confrontations of social change and revolution in the field.

Can the envisaged initiative break out of the double standard? Can it «recognize» simultaneously the two poles of the duality whereby new forms are engendered, and thereby move into a more organic mode without the primitive extremes of artificiality and bloodshed?

Possible criteria for success

8. By what criteria is it possible to determine whether this new initiative is moving out of the currently impotent mode into one offering some hope of breakthrough or transmutation?

8.1. Topic interrelationship: the prospectus should do more than simply provide a short-list of major world problems with lip service paid to the fact that they are all «interrelated». What (meeting) processes can be used which respect the degree of interrelationship, the artificiality of the categories, and the essential incompatibility of the perspectives which need to be brought into juxtaposition? For it would seem that most of our essential concerns come in pairs which are dynamically opposed to one another, and this opposition can only be reconciled within a dynamic framework characterized by apparent paradox and contradiction.

8.2. Group interrelationships: what degree of group interrelationship is called for by this initiative? Would that achieved during the recent International Year of the Child be considered adequate? If more is required, the prospectus should be more explicit about facing up to the very real obstacles to better networking. It is not sufficient to be content to alienate those who do not concur. The energy of complementary viewpoints in opposition is a guarantee of realism.

8.3. Role of initiators: such initiatives are usually judged by the bodies which function as focalizers. The prospectus needs to be explicit as to how the process will move beyond the limitations of the focalizers in order to benefit from the diversity of organizations which might be attracted to this initiative. What are the conscious and unconscious filters by which topics and collaborating organizations will be selected? How are such filters justified?

8.4. Unanswerable questions: what are the questions which this initiative considers unfruitful to confront? Can the initiative face up to its own «shadow» (in the Jungian sense)?

For example, the prospectus may stress the importance of «positive» attitudes. Does this effectively exclude any exercise of the critical faculty? Does it mean a commitment to avoid using sentences containing negatives (except in relation to negativity itself)? This leads to very simplistic thinking: day/night, high/low, young/old, life/death, summer/winter, etc. are necessary complements. As any gardener knows, an «eternal summer» could only be unfruitful in the long-term (however much participants enjoyed the sunny period). Initiatives often reinforce the assumption that the world crisis can be resolved by everybody embracing everybody else and thus dissolving all differences in an upwelling of empathy and love. This archetypal vision avoids any concern with the significance of those differences in perspective for the development of the energy of those who are identified with them. Human development is not simply a matter of eliminating differences. Those differences presumably need to be brought together into some appropriate relationship to each other as a basis for whatever is to be the next step in the evolution of humanity.

8.5. «So what?»: It is useful to consider the significance of the initiative as though it had already been completed. What has been accomplished and has it been more than a «useful exercise»? What is the likelihood that much will be done about any «Plan of Action» of which the U.N. has generated many of the double standard? Can a sufficiently exciting scenario be prepared for the culminating initiative? Can sufficient content be given to the hope for change of attitude in the participants - and organizers?

8.6. Acknowledgement of past initiatives: does the prospectus acknowledge past initiatives and is it designed in the light of lessons learnt from such experiences? Or does it create the impression that it is the first effort of this kind and therefore free to act without the constraints of past experience?

8.7. Limitations: does the initiative recognize the geo-political limitations of its impact? Or is it content to claim world-wide coverage in the light of token activity in other geopolitical blocs? How can compensations for such limitations be designed?

8.8. Personality problems: how does the initiative plan to handle the personality problems between the figures which usually underlie and undermine such projects? Is the «democratic» procedure of electing pre-selected officers into the usual hierarchical framework to be accepted uncritically rather than as symptomatic of a mode of proven inadequacy? Or is it sufficient to ignore these problems in the hope that they will quietly disappear?

8.9. Self-reference: in preparing this initiative can its advocated procedure be meaningfully applied to itself? Can sufficient new content be given to a «Plan of Action» to make the work sufficiently magnetic and distinctive from previous initiatives? Can a sufficiently exciting scenario be prepared for the culminating initiative? Can sufficient content be given to the hope for change of attitude in the participants - and organizers?

Conclusion

It would be a serious mistake to perceive the above considerations as a «negative» or «pessimistic» damper on any initiative. The international community has experimented with a variety of initiatives over the past two decades. We should not fool ourselves by the content of the «success stories» which those involved feel obliged to circulate afterwards for public relations reasons. Achievements have varied from modest to insignificant when measured against the dimensions of the problem. The first step towards more significant initiatives is to recognize how the previous ones have tended to fail. The purpose of this document is simply to point out that possibly we are not taking into account important constraints. To avoid acknowledging constraints is the most stupid form of «positive» thinking. Constraints are essential to good design as any architect, artist or inventor knows. The question is how can we learn to use them creatively.

If we do not know how we are part of the problem, we cannot understand the nature of the solution required.

If we do not know how we are part of the solution, we cannot understand the nature of the problem we face.

Is the planned initiative to be a metaphor of our collective problem or of the solution required, or will it be a catalyst or world transformation?