

Redesign and Management of Communities in Crisis

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*to Philip and Patricia Taylor,
messengers sent...*

*"... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery
of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed..."*

Luke 4:18

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PREFACE

Sweden boasts an excellent care for its physically handicapped, prisons with almost hotel-like accommodation and the provision of an endless list of benefits to its citizens. All of them are obtainable with no sweat of the brow from a government that acts as a welfare mother of all. But, it has also produced an oppressive society. In the dispensing of welfare, the state claims the right to meddle in almost every aspect of the people's lives and has sought to manipulate every institution, including the family, the church and the university, by weakening its leadership. In such a secularised society, the church gets by like the waterman in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, looking one way and rowing another. In many of the universities, especially the young ones, a strong anti-intellectual climate has been nurtured. Learning is denigrated and anyone can boast of his own truth obtained not by studying and burning the proverbial candle, but from that which comes into his mind and justifies his actions. The classrooms have been swamped by a blend of technology and bureaucracy. By interfering beyond the legitimate boundaries, the government has systematically implanted passiveness, over-dependence on the state, intellectual

mediocrity and depression. It has weakened the people's souls and minds and oppressed them, not with guns and jails, but with subtle social and institutional intimidation. And with welfare cheques.

Certainly these attributes are not unique to Sweden; they are spread all over the industrialised world. What is special in Sweden is their uniformity. For until recently, there were few really bad things in Sweden, but there also were few really good things. The scarcity of villains was matched by a scarcity of heroes and martyrs because the elimination of the weeds had turned into the elimination of the wheat. Nevertheless, really bad things — such as violence, poverty and racism — have started to happen, and people who can combat these things are in desperate shortage. However, not all heroes and martyrs have been rooted out and there is a small group of them that are taking on leadership responsibilities and are seeking to release their communities from government domination. It was with the intention to help this process of renewal that my wife Veronica and I came to live in Luleå almost seven years ago. Towards the end of 1996, Veronica started to focus her research on the viability of villages and began her investigation in Rosvik, a village not far south from Luleå. At the same time, she urged me to develop a method to apply the theory expounded in my earlier book *A New Management of Life* to real life. I took on this challenge and we started to collaborate in this new venture, Veronica working in Rosvik and I working in association with a European Community project in the town of Boden. While the focus of her work was community research, mine was developing a qualitative method that would bridge my theoretical work with our research applications. I also developed a computer programme to help us with the task. Thus this book is based on what Veronica and I have learned from these experiences. While it refers to

the work in Boden as an illustration, its emphasis is on method rather than application. What has been learned about the viability of villages through this theory and method will be reported in Veronica's doctoral dissertation to be completed soon.

Working together in a common scientific endeavour has added yet another dimension to the life we have shared for more than 28 years. Together we have sought to restore the Augustinian meaning of science by reuniting the mind with the soul and understanding with faith. We believe that only then can we really integrate science to our lives, and by so living it, make it relevant to the people whom we seek to serve. It has also meant that we have not done our science from the outside, but we have done it from within while sharing the joys and tears of our Swedish friends. Needless to say, I am greatly indebted to Veronica's contribution of her ideas and encouragement to our mission and also for testing new methods that were not yet properly developed and which I kept repeatedly changing.

Several colleagues have also helped me in my work and I would like here to record my gratitude to them. Helena Zimmer, who led the project in Boden, is a great collaborator and provided me with a wealth of information and insights into her own project. Darek Eriksson, my doctoral student, has been for many years a keen supporter of my work. I would like to thank the Division of Information Systems of the Swedish Defence Forces, where he worked for two years, for funding the development of my modelling method. I would also like to thank Per Agrell, of the Operational Research Department of the Swedish Defence Forces. He introduced me to the local operational research and systems science community on my arrival to Sweden and has since encouraged me and helped me in countless ways. He has

many times been a kind host to my family and I at his home in the Stockholm archipelago and on his sailing boat.

I have been blessed in life with wonderful friends who have much influenced me, I am sure, for the better. Two of them, whom I met more than 30 years ago on my way from Tahiti to Sydney when I was still a young man wandering through life, did more than influence me. They passed on to me a vision that releases us from oppression and that changes the world. It turned me from a wanderer into a pilgrim and labourer for its fulfilment and supplied me with the foundation of my work. Furthermore, they have been assiduous workers in their community, including a long period of service as Mayor and Mayoress of Burwood, New South Wales. Thus, it is to express my admiration for them and my gratitude for our long friendship that I dedicate the present book to them.

Luleå, Ascension day, 2000.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

... The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. They're well off; they're safe; they're never ill; they're not afraid of death; they're blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they're plagued with no mothers or fathers; they've got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about; they're so conditioned that they practically can't help behaving as they ought to behave.

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*.

There are two types of poverty: material and spiritual. The first one manifests itself in hunger, violence, disease and death, the second one, in meaninglessness, emptiness and depression. In the first, people are oppressed by the absence of wealth, in the second; they are oppressed by its abundance. The first is constantly exposed to the world through television and other forms of media. The second is concealed by our boasting of the quality of life and endless fun that is available to the rich. The first we acknowledge as being part of reality. Yet, recently, when I spoke to a group of villagers about the need to tackle our normative issues to ensure long-term viability, I

was reminded that we are far more reluctant to acknowledge the second. By normative I meant what type of people we ought to be. I also meant what we ought to do and not to do with our lives. A member of the audience responded that, although looking after the normative things of life was fine, one needed to be realistic. One needed to set one's eyes on concrete objectives. He then proceeded to read a list of such objectives in his community's five-year plan that included such things as new broadband technology, ten to twenty new businesses and development of tourism. This, he pointed out to me, were real objectives.

How is it possible that we can be so well aware of the material sufferings of people all over the world and yet be oblivious to our own spiritual misery? How is it possible that we still believe that man lives from bread alone? At least part of this must be because we have been taught to think of humanity as comprised by an assembly of watertight compartments. What happens in one part of our life does not have any significance in another part. We believe, for example, that the personal life and values of a person play no role in the performance of his profession. A President that cheats on his wife and artfully lies to a court can still deliver a solid economy and peace in the world. A large proportion of our youth may be neglected by their parents, lonely and poorly educated, but our community can ignore them and want new broadband technology and all the other real objectives in the community's plan. We must be real. We can have our full belly and ignore every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Therefore, we need a new way of thinking that focuses on a broader reality and that captures within its lens the misery of the affluent. I have laboured to develop such an approach to thinking. I have tried to include the issues that truly matter in life but that somehow seem to slip out of the sight of

politicians, managers and other people who make the important decisions in our community¹. This book turns to the practical application of this mode of thought. My objective in writing it has been to expound a method to help communities and other social systems ensure their viability and manage the crises they confront. Viability, that is, the assurance of ongoing life has been my ultimate aim. I do not only mean biological life, but an abundant life, a life that spans the whole gamut of our humanity. It should include artistic, intellectual, social, family and other expressions of human life. When we face a crisis and any of these spheres of life is threatened, our whole life is in question. To live, one must live life to the full. If any part is taken out of life, the whole of life is endangered.

The method is not intended to tell people in a social system or a community how to perform their jobs. I assume that they know how to do this. The method helps them organise and integrate knowledge and information that stems out of different disciplines. These are gathered both from reading and from experience and are included in a model. They can use this model to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their community and the essential factors that determine the likelihood of the community being viable in the long term. They can also use the model to define the qualities they would like their community to have, the activities that must be performed and the people needed to perform them. The model can also assist them to organise themselves to perform and manage these activities. Finally, they can then superimpose the model over this new design and evaluate to what extent this design contributes to making the community more viable.

¹ de Raadt 1996, 1997a, b and c.

We begin in Chapter 2 with an exposition of the multi-modal systems framework. This framework permits us to view the world not only in terms of the things we see in it but also in the way that they are linked to each other and to our lives. It takes the universe as a creation of God, with his personality imprinted on it, and it assumes that one must understand his personality to be able to make sense of the universe and our lives. One may not need to know God to understand the bits and pieces of the universe. However, I know no other way to comprehend the meaning of the universe, what is our place in it and what is the destiny of our lives apart from knowing God, his thoughts and his plan. It is only by listening to God that people have learned about their character, their community, their intellect and nature in general. But, one also needs to listen to God to understand why the world is in such a mess. For every day, we confront a world that does not work and that desperately needs something to be done about it. Thus, the chapter provides a framework to capture the different aspects of God's communication to us, to understand the sad predicament of the world and to do something about it.

It may sound surprising in a secularised environment my speaking about knowing God. Secularism has been craftily introduced into our western culture. People have been lured into thinking that agnosticism is the natural state of modern man and that belief in a personal God is a peculiarity of a small group of people who stick to their old-fashioned ways. The opposite is however the truth. Most of humanity, by its very nature rather than by its culture, seeks to know God. That is why religion is one of the most resilient ingredients in man's life, often lasting for thousands of years. By these measures of time, secularism is an untested newcomer that has influenced only a minority of people in almost exclusively rich — and not as civilised as we hope —

countries. Agnosticism has often been encouraged among these people by citing the ethnic conflicts, wars and persecutions that have arisen out of the abuse of religion. Naturally, the abuse of religion, like the abuse of any other part of man's life, has led to much human suffering. However, the secularist solution to this problem by means of promoting agnosticism makes as much sense as restraining a man who beats his wife by amputating his arms. We should eliminate the abuse, not what is abused. Therefore, by making man's timeless interaction with God an integral part of our framework, I hope to show the reader how belief in Christ relates to our individual and communal crisis and can help us become viable. Science cannot prove to us what we believe by faith, but it can tell us whether what we believe makes intelligent sense to our living a meaningful life. It can reveal the intricate links that exist between the different dimensions — including the spiritual — of human life.

After completing the presentation of this framework, we turn in Chapter 3 to our manner of thinking. We first examine how understanding is related to information, history and faith and how these four aspects of our intellect interact with each other. Next we examine how the multi-modal systems framework brings the different sciences together to integrate their knowledge. However, knowledge on its own is of little use unless it is transformed into service to humanity. In the second part of this chapter, we examine the place of work in the community and its need to be supported by management and an appropriate social structure.

In Chapter 4, we commence the practical application of multi-modal systems thinking. We begin by describing a case study in Boden, a town in the northern part of Sweden that will serve as a practical illustration throughout this book. After identifying in general terms the crisis that faces this town, we present an overview of the stages and steps of the

multi-modal systems method. We follow with a description of the process of data collection and its organisation and the identification of the most important factors influencing the viability of Boden. From here on, these factors constitute the kernel of our analysis. We then examine the interactions between these factors and, by superimposing the multi-modal systems framework upon them, we build a preliminary model.

In Chapter 5, we examine four factors that have to do with the character and intellect of Boden: caring, art, education and vision. Our aim is to establish how these factors and the way that they are interconnected support or undermine the long-term viability of Boden. This analysis is continued in Chapter 6. Here we focus on the factors that belong to the communal aspects of the town: work, management and social structure.

In Chapter 7 we summarise our findings and identify the most critical links between the factors. At this point, the analytical stage of the method is completed. We next turn to design a response to the threats that endanger Boden. Firstly, we describe what type of town we would like Boden to be by ascribing to each of the factors a desired quality. Secondly, we define the operations that are necessary for each of these qualities to be attained. Thirdly, we identify the social groups that will carry out these operations. Once the design is completed, we once more analyse how this design helps Boden's viability by determining the extent to which the new design neutralises the threats against Boden.

I conclude with a note regarding the complexity of the ideas presented in this book. There is a law of cybernetics, Ashby's law², that also applies to information. It stipulates that any system must match as closely as possible its

² Ashby's law of requisite variety, Ashby, 1976, de Raadt, 1987 and 1991.

environmental uncertainties with an equivalent amount of information if it is to remain viable. Translated into our own concern, it means that communities that are threatened by complex changes in their socio-economic environment must develop models with a suitable degree of complexity if they wish to gain control of their situation. Therefore, although the modelling method that we present here is still a vast simplification when compared to the tangle in which our society finds itself, it is still a complex method. I wish that I could present my reader with something more simple and straightforward, but Ashby's law has impeded it.

CHAPTER 2

Multi-Modal Systems Framework

We are concerned with the sustenance of life amidst a crisis that threatens it. To understand life and its threats, it is paramount that we should understand how its elements are linked with each other. Let us consider a simple example such as the baking of bread illustrated in Figure 1.

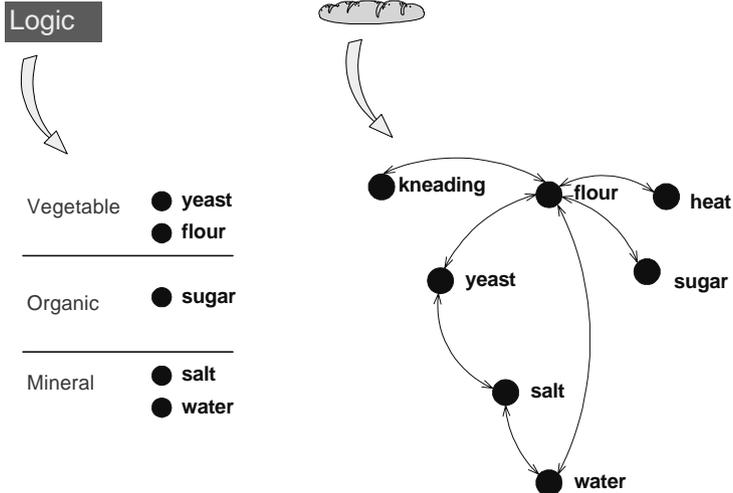


FIGURE 1: TWO WAYS OF THINKING