CHAPTER SIX

Designing

Designing is "a kind of making".[1] Designers juggle things until they get a conceptual picture of the creative interaction between parts of a system that will do what they want it to do. Designs model how things work or how designers think that they will work. Producing designs is an important part of the processes we are describing.

Deciding the word to use to describe this important activity was difficult. "Designing" is not a word in common use in church and community work. Of itself this is significant; it points to its neglect. It is widely used in engineering, building, the arts and the world of fashion. I could not think of a better one. Designing, so closely associated with making and inventing things in every aspect of human life, is a key activity in constructive development work. "Planning" is another possible word but I prefer to use this for making the organizational arrangements of just how, when and by whom designs are to be translated into action.

Consciously or unconsciously we design work programmes and projects to meet our understandings of how people and things actually do work, how we think that they should work and how we think things should be done. Consequently, underlying all human action is a design which reflects reality as we perceive it. Some designs work, others don't. Trying to make bad, inappropriate or impossible designs work is the source of many problems I encounter in church and community development work.[2] Such designs squander energy unproductively and cause scarce resources to be spent prolifically on repairing damage and salvaging projects rather than doing the job they were meant to do. Faulty designs bedevil (play the devil with) development work, workers and people. Workers and people become frustrated and disillusioned and experience conflict and pain. And sometimes they can blame themselves rather than the design. In some cases the effects of using bad designs make it impossible to do anything constructive along similar lines for some considerable time.

For the main part I find designs are implicit rather than explicit. Consequently, clergy and laity do not normally work to them nor at them. More often than not, the inner design is formed by planning the outer action—or through using traditional, inherited or standard designs for church and community work such as clubs, playgroups, neighbourhood schemes, church audits. Rarely do workers, in my experience, address themselves directly and purposefully to the *design* of their own programmes. Only a few of them have acquired the ability

to do so. Once they are alerted to the importance of designing and given some tools with which to do it they work at it with verve, as can be seen from the work that the Jesuits did which is described in Chapter 4.

Designing, one of the most neglected aspects of all forms of church and community development work, is one of the most exciting but demanding activities, which pays high dividends. In this chapter I attempt to describe it and to give some clues about how to go about it. Then I invite you to consider the ideas about designing in relation to the worked examples in Part One.

I. DESIGNS

Preparing for creative action involves crossing the Rubicon between two complementary creative activities: analysis and design. To analyse is to take things apart in order to identify their inner nature and how they function. To design church and community work programmes is to conceptualize patterns of human behaviour, action and organization which will achieve desired ends in specific situations and contexts because they fit what is known from theology, theory, analysis and experience about working with people and God. Designs are, in fact, models that disclose the relationships and organizational dynamics that are not normally observable. Designs show how to put the "parts" together so that they work. A design, therefore, comprises a creative system of causal connections between people and organizations necessary to a programme of development work. The design in Figure 6:1 described in Chapter Four illustrates this definition—fortunately it is easier to illustrate the design process than to describe and define it.[3]

This diagram shows the pattern of working relationships that the Jesuit Team believed would achieve their purposes in Portadown. Such designs are to church and community workers what architects' drawings are to builders. They show what needs to be constructed but they do not indicate how to do so. Our illustration, for example, does not show how to establish the working relationships nor the order in which to do so—but it does show the relationships that are needed to make the project work. Working out how to build those relationships is part of what is involved in making the design operative in Portadown; that is, in taking it from the "drawing board" and embodying it in the workplace. Doing this involves planning, organizing and doing. At best these activities follow designing. Regrettably, because, as we have noted, designing is neglected, they are generally carried out without conscious reference to the design implicit in them. But no matter how carefully they are done they cannot be a substitute for designing and they are always more effective when the design is used explicitly. In fact, designing and planning and organizing are most likely to be done well when they are seen as discrete sequential activities.

Other examples of designs in this book are: the bishop's work contexts

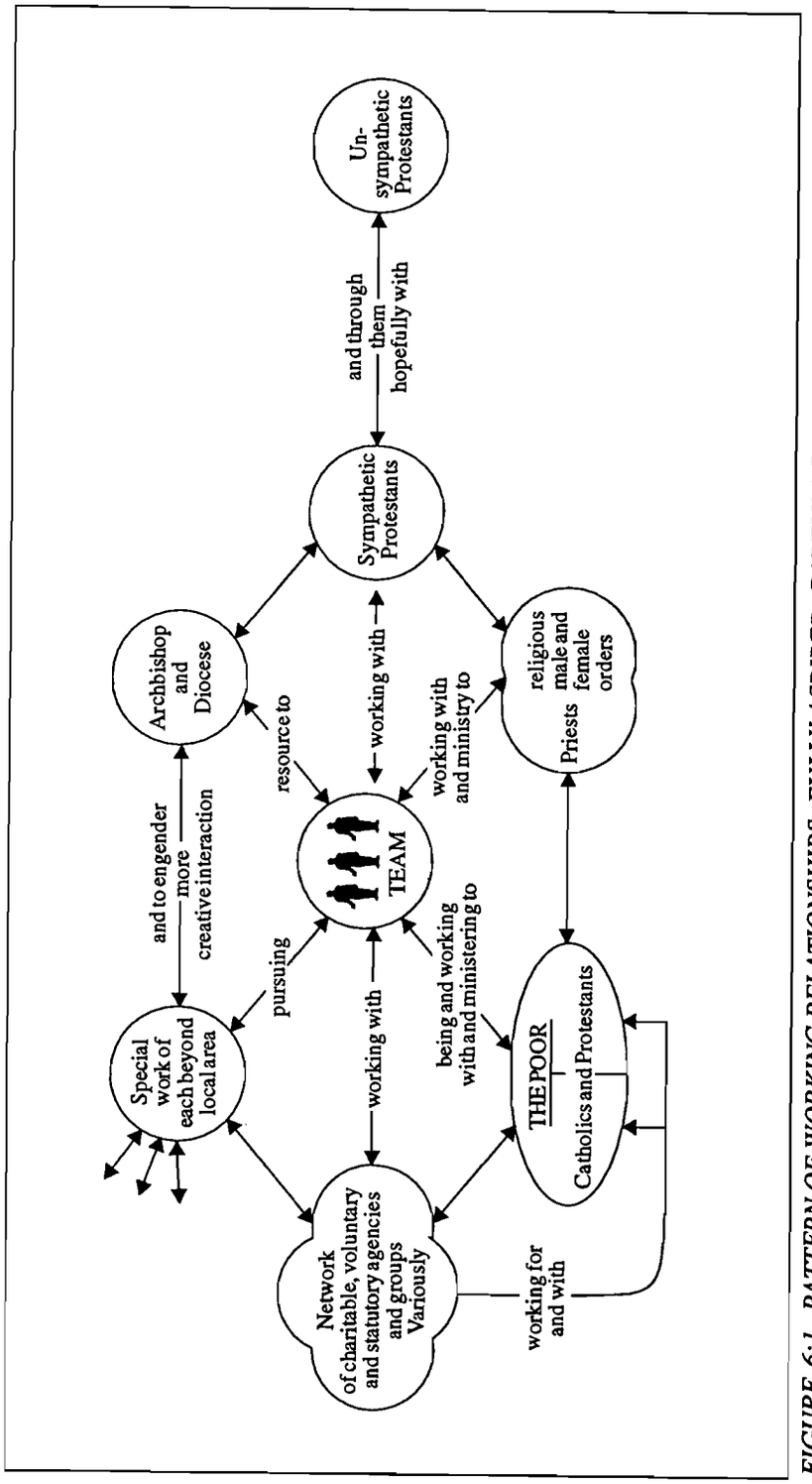

FIGURE 6:1. PATTERN OF WORKING RELATIONSHIPS: FULLY ASPIRED: PARTLY ACHIEVED

(Figure 3:1); the processes employed during the "Relationships In Mission" consultations (Figure 5:3); and the schema for analysing and designing church and community work, which is of itself a design (Figure 5:2).

II. DESIGNS AS ACTION-SYSTEMS

Basically there are three approaches to the promotion of church and community development through the use of the processes described in this book. The first is to make churches, religious and secular communities and Christian voluntary agencies more effective agents of overall human and spiritual development through their existing programmes and structures. The second is to introduce new programmes and projects into these agencies. The third is to introduce alternative ways and means of promoting development and contributing to the common good. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 illustrate the first approach; Chapter 4 illustrates the second and third approaches.

These approaches variously involve designing or re-designing action-systems[4] of one kind or another. If they are to work these systems have to mesh positively with churches, communities, and organizations, which are the host systems.* They comprise inter-related parts which work, or are meant to work, in particular ways according to the functions they have to perform, the purposes they have to achieve in specific situations, and the beliefs of those involved in them. They vary infinitely in nature, type, size, structure, and dynamic, and in the underlying design. Those involved in these systems can reject or accept ideas to modify their existing design and proposals to introduce new ones. Thus, development programmes and projects involve conceiving action-systems that will work in the human systems that will host them and alongside other systems with which they need to engage creatively. For this to happen it must be possible to introduce the action-system of the new design without its being rejected before it is accepted by and embodied in the host system. All this is illustrated by the project in Portadown described in Chapter 4. The Jesuits were introducing an alternative way of being and doing into a host community so that they could work with a range of Catholic, Protestant and secular organizations. By avoiding rejection they gave their project the time necessary for it to be embodied in the church, religious orders and the community.

Thinking in this way of one system entering or modifying another helps me to think more realistically and comprehensively when designing development programmes. It makes me think systemically. It makes me check for a fit between action and host systems. It reminds me that the host and not the action-system is the primary system. In some cases the action-system is to the host

*A system is "a group of related elements organized for a purpose".[5] It is "an organized whole made up of the interdependent elements that can be defined only with reference to each other and in terms of their positions in the whole".[6]

system what scaffolding is to a building and a starter motor to the engine. In other cases it is a new sub-system. Thinking in this way helps me to avoid designing programmes which are "linear task models"[7] that cut through host systems destructively[8].

III. ASPECTS OF DESIGNING

Analysis is commonly thought of as a science and designing as an art. My experience is that each is both an art and a science. One of the dangers of thinking of designing as an art is that it can imply that one's ability to design depends upon having artistic gifts. Certainly some people have more of a flair for designing church and community work development programmes and projects than others have. However, my experience over and again is that people who claim to have no natural gifts in this direction can be pleasantly surprised at what they can in fact do. Awareness of the nature of the activity and the simple devices I will describe can release in workers imaginative and creative design ability that they did not know they had. My aim in this section and the next is modest; it is to share ideas that have helped me and clergy, religious and laity working at all levels in the church and community to design programmes.

Designing church and community work programmes starts to become possible for me when I break it down into four discrete tasks.

1. Determining precisely what the design has to do, i.e. what it has to produce, the functions it has to perform and the ends to which it has to contribute and, equally important, what it has not to do (cf. the discussion about "noxiants").
2. Identifying the "givens" within which or in relation to which the design has to function effectively. I call these design criteria. They include things such as: beliefs about the ways in which one should/should not deal with people in general and in particular settings and circumstances, culture, purposes, human and physical resources, work rhythms of the participants, contracts, commitments, constraints of particular situations, local factors. Designs that will work have simply got to meet these criteria.
3. Thinking out designs (I discuss aids to doing this in the next section).
4. Testing out designs. One way to do this is by the designers themselves checking a design with the function (1 above) and the criteria (2 above), or by checking the design with people who know whether or not the design will work in the situation for which it is intended and whether or not it is a fit with the workers' frames of reference. Time after time I have seen such people suggest modifications that made

the difference between success and failure. Sometimes it is possible to test designs through pilot projects, but that is not always possible. The Portadown project is a case in point.

The sequence is not invariable. In the design of the Portadown project, for example, the best statement of purpose came when the design was complete; "givens" emerged as we proceeded with the design and we were testing out the design for viability as each part of the design emerged.

These processes are directed towards designing programmes and projects for specific situations. They have to fit given circumstances—suitably adapted, they may well fit other situations, of course. All situational designs, however, have to fit the grand design of the Kingdom of God and meet the criteria derived from our understanding of it. What we are about, therefore, is situational and theological designing. Consequently, the study of the workplace and its context needs to be undertaken along with the study of the Kingdom.

IV. AIDS

This section continues the discussion started in the previous one about the *how* of designing by attempting to answer a clutch of questions. How do you find the causal connections in human affairs which enable people to live and work together ever more effectively and efficiently? How do you design programmes and projects which positively affect being, culture and spirituality? How do you find ways of going about things that mesh into given realities and engender purposeful progress? Here I share quite simple things that have helped me and others to do these things.

1. Forming Patterns

All human situations are complex. Finding how things could go together creatively is not easy. When I am trying to do a jigsaw puzzle I put as many of the pieces as possible on a tray so that I can start to see which pieces fit together. This helps me to find "straight edges" which frame the picture puzzle, to collect pieces that seem to go together and to start to work on parts of the jigsaw.

A similar procedure helps me to design development work programmes. I set out on a piece of paper notes of the "things" that could be part of the design. Reflecting on what I have found myself doing intuitively for many years, I discern a recurring pattern in the way in which I do this. Purposes, beliefs, and design criteria I tend to put around the edges because they constitute the principal frame of reference. In the centre and towards the left I tend to put the development tasks—in the centre because of the need to focus on doing them and on the left because that gives room to plot the process towards the purposes which I invariably put top-right and away from the things to be avoided in the bottom-right. Alongside this I note the available human and physical resources,

the events (meetings, services), the groups, the structures, the procedures which could possibly become part of the design. This process is not as orderly as it would seem from this description—it never comes out in the same way twice. Sometimes there is much on the paper, other times a few words or symbols. The objectives of this part of the exercise are twofold: to bring all these things into consciousness and to lay them out so that they can be seen, looked and stared at, and mulled over; and to ensure that critical and troublesome things are not overlooked. It is amazing how often doing this brings other highly relevant information and factors into consciousness and into play which just had not occurred to people during the analysis.

Now people can start designing by concentrating on all that is on the sheet until possibilities start to arise and connections are made by discovering how events, resources and people could possibly contribute towards achieving purposes; by discerning causal sequences and creative structures.

This is a simple device involving setting out the parts as a prelude for looking for patterns—but who but an absolute master would think of playing chess without the pieces on a board visible to sight? I have never known it fail to help people to get involved in designing.

Sometimes the general outline of a grand design stands out and it is so clearly right that it only remains to fill in the detail. When this happens I find it advisable to check it against any other possible alternatives that can be conceived. When no design comes immediately to mind I try to think and get others to think of as many ideas as possible without reference to their merit, feasibility or viability. Frequently people who previously said that they were stuck and had no ideas before the things were put on paper find to their surprise that they do have ideas. They start to put pieces together until a coherent design is produced and framed with reference points. When no design emerges I try one or more of the following devices.

Reflecting on the things that could form parts of the design. This can be done, for instance, by concentrating on the information until it "speaks to you". That involves waiting in patience upon the situation. Patterns often emerge as we simply gaze at things, concentrate on this and that, pursue thoughts that emerge, browse, focus in and out on this and that. (I actually look at it from another perspective and squint at it.)

Consciously searching for a design by: working out who and what are essential to the design; searching out the connections that will enable them to work together to achieve the desired results; and finding ways of portraying objectively and succinctly the emergent design so that others can consider it critically.

Brainstorming. The approach here is almost the opposite to reflecting. It is a way of eliciting creative thinking through generating an atmosphere in which

people share whatever thoughts occur to them as they occur, without reflecting upon their merit. To encourage people to think aloud, to engage in "free-association", the atmosphere must be non-critical and non-judgmental.[9] One thought triggers off another.

Brainstorming is normally associated with groups, but it can be done by individuals. I do it often. One of the ways in which I do it is by simply putting things on a piece of paper as they occur as quickly as I can to keep up the momentum, to allow one thought to spark off another and to stifle relective thinking until I cannot think of any other ideas. Another way that I do it is by tracing out the free association of my thoughts by putting them on paper with connecting lines. When I come to the end of a train of thought I start again with the next idea. Eventually there is a pattern of my thinking on paper. Tony Buzan calls these "brain patterns".[10] This of course can be done in, by and for a group. Once the ideas and thoughts are out we/I can work on them. Some will be discarded, whilst others may well combine to form a design.

Lateral thinking. Edward de Bono coined this phrase. Lateral thinking is "sideways thinking", whereas the most common way of thinking is "straight-ahead thinking", or what de Bono calls "*vertical thinking*". At best these are complementary modes of thinking.[11] One of the things that I got from de Bono's writings was the way I could obtain new insights by turning my attention from a problem that was defying solution by logical forward thinking (through, for example, using the problem-solving approach described in Chapter 2) to the first thing that caught my eye when I turned away from it.

An example comes to mind. Early one morning I was travelling up to London with a colleague with whom I was conducting a course. As we travelled there were two topics of conversation, the nature of lateral thinking and a deep concern we had that members of the course had shied off a topic that we thought was the key to a cluster of problems. Before we got off the train I suggested we think about the first thing that struck us in order to illustrate and test the lateral thinking method. What struck us was that in a moment of time the empty platform was flooded by commuters who were moving steadily through the narrow ticket collector's gate. Considering this we fastened on the flow problems that railway organizers must face. After doing this for some time we said almost in the same breath. "Our problem with the course is that we have not got the thinking flow right". An adjustment in the sequence was all that was needed; it corrected the design of the course.

Lateral thinking is a way in which things normally dissociated are brought into proximity. This can just happen: an apple falls and Newton grasps the theory of gravity; Jeremiah stared with a glassy gaze at a cauldron on a fire fanned by the wind from the north and knew in a moment that disaster would flare up from the north.[12] Such incidents are variously said to happen by chance or by providence. However that may be, they just happen; they cannot be foreseen. Lateral thinking is a way of "contriving" comparable experiences.

Comparing and contrasting the actual, the preferred (or the ideal) scenarios. Dr Gerard Egan[13] has evolved a method of designing "action strategies" by describing and comparing "current" and a range of "preferred scenarios". Questions that help to define the preferred scenarios are: What would the problem look like if solved? What would the opportunity look like if developed? What do you want things to look like? Once described, these scenarios can be contrasted and compared with a view to discerning what action could help to change the actual into the ideal and the project design that would facilitate it.

Viewing the actual and the preferred from different perspectives. Once the current and preferred scenarios are established, there are at least three perspectives from which to view them in the search for clues as to how to design programmes of action that move from the actual to the ideal. The first looks at both of them from some position objective to both; the second looks at the ideal from the actual; the third looks at the actual from the ideal.[14] Workers deeply involved in situations generally adopt the second perspective and find it difficult to move to the first or the third. People outside the situation adopt the first or third perspective and have to discipline themselves to gain something approximate to the second. Working on the third perspective is less common than working on the other two. It is the reverse of thinking and working our way forwards from what is to what we want. It is like imagining the way up a hill from the top rather than from the bottom. The interaction of perspectives can be generated by deliberately adopting each perspective in turn or by members of a group forming sub-groups, each taking one perspective and then sharing what emerges. Ideas for designs can come from these processes.

Identifying "constraints" and finding ways of releasing them. Designs frequently concentrate upon using and reinforcing the positive drives and the growth points and develop programmes that bypass the constraints. The Revd David Wasdell[15] suggests we should work on the constraints:

> Research into patterns of organization development, carried out repeatedly since before the Second World War, and confirmed in institution after institution, indicates that long-term development of an organization towards a given objective is rarely achieved simply by reinforcing the positive drives. Time and again such a strategy starts off well but at another level of the organization's behaviour, it triggers off further negative constraints and inhibits the performance of its task. These new constraints then mount until they overwhelm the new initiatives. At that point, whatever the energy put into the strategy, no apparent results are forthcoming. The organization becomes highly stressed, tends to withdraw its positive initiatives and moves into decline, retreating further away from the goals towards which it was trying to move. Christian congregations have proved to be no exception to this general rule.

Long-term church development requires the identification of those elements in the church's life which are acting as blocks, constraints, or inhibitors, of the church's achievement of the particular goal in question. Once those constraints have been identified, then strategic planning must focus on releasing the constraints, removing the inhibitions, overcoming the blockages, so freeing the church to move naturally under the power of its already active drives towards the goal it seeks to achieve.

Finding ways and means of overcoming and releasing constraints is one of the most important aspects of designing development work programmes and projects.

2. Visual Aids

Visual aids—charts, diagrams, maps, models, plans—have formed an important part of what I have said about designing. Sadly much designing and planning in church and community development work is done in people's heads and through talking things through. On many occasions I have sat through two or three hours of a planning meeting and no one has put a note on a piece of paper except myself: such a meeting comprises a group of "talking heads". I have been struggling to give coherent shape to what has been said on my pad. More often than not the people are neither trained nor used to designing and planning. Such groups have neither private notes nor common reference points readily provided by words, diagrams, charts on a board or a piece of newsprint. Most people simply cannot design sound development programmes whilst they remain "talking heads". In fact, I cannot see how it is possible to design without resorting to the use of diagrams. Amongst other things, using the diagrams draws upon the right hemisphere of the brain (the non-verbal) and complements the use of the left hemisphere (the verbal). (There is a section in Chapter 7 on the use of diagrams in analysis and design.) I find that the most useful diagrams simply come without words as I take up a pen to draw them.

Some people can design and plan in their heads and through talking but even then, as the following quotation shows, it is advisable to write them down:

> While it is perfectly possible to develop a whole plan in one's head, it is better to write it down so that everyone can understand and agree what is to be done. This will avoid confusion later on, and it helps to ensure that an inexperienced manager thinks through the project and works out what needs to be done and who will do it.
>
> Furthermore a written plan goes far beyond a brief description of the project . . . and will allow responsible sponsors and others to help identify pitfalls or opportunities for improvement.[16]

3. Separate Designing from Planning and Programming

Separating designing from planning and programming enables people to concentrate on designing freely and imaginatively. They are different kinds of activities, which, if attempted together, can confuse each other. When we turn from designing to putting designs to work we are involved in making arrangements of one kind or another with individuals and groups, organizing meetings and planning events. Doing these things test out the design and its viability and may well lead to adjustments to it.

V. COMPARING THEORY WITH PRACTICE

Reviewing Part One in the light of the ideas and suggestions in this chapter about designing is one way of exploring just how designs can emerge. You might consider, for instance, how, in Chapter 4, the project designs evolved, and the contributions made by the methods you have just read about. Another thing you might do is to model the design of the action plans emerging from the study of the case and problem in Chapters 1 and 2. Yet another thing to do is to examine the way in which the bishop made profound changes in the design of his theological project. (cf. Chapter 3.) To illustrate these changes I have modelled the original and the revised designs in Figures 6:2 and 6:3. The original design was one through which the bishop tried to get others to adopt the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. The revised design was one by which he intended to get people to share and explore their theological orientations. The original design is a linear change model aimed at development through the theological conversion of others to a particular doctrine. The revised design is very different: it is a systemic process aimed at all-round theological development through engendering mutual theological acceptance (a key element in "justification"), understanding and critical interaction between people. The original design evangelizes to a given theological position; the revised design evangelizes to a given pluralistic theological process. The original is "single-loop learning" (i.e. acting in relation to a set of norms); the revised is "double-loop learning" (i.e. taking a double look at the norms of all concerned).

Both designs could be divisive: in relation to the original design, some people would object to the theological content and to the implicit theology of the approach and method with its propensity towards theological uniformity and exclusivism; in relation to the revised design, some would object to the theology of the approach, which is overtly inclusive, pluralistic and collaborative. Initiators in both cases contribute their own theological ideas as well as facilitate the processes—even if these are different ones requiring different skills and commitments to different theological stances, positions and processes.

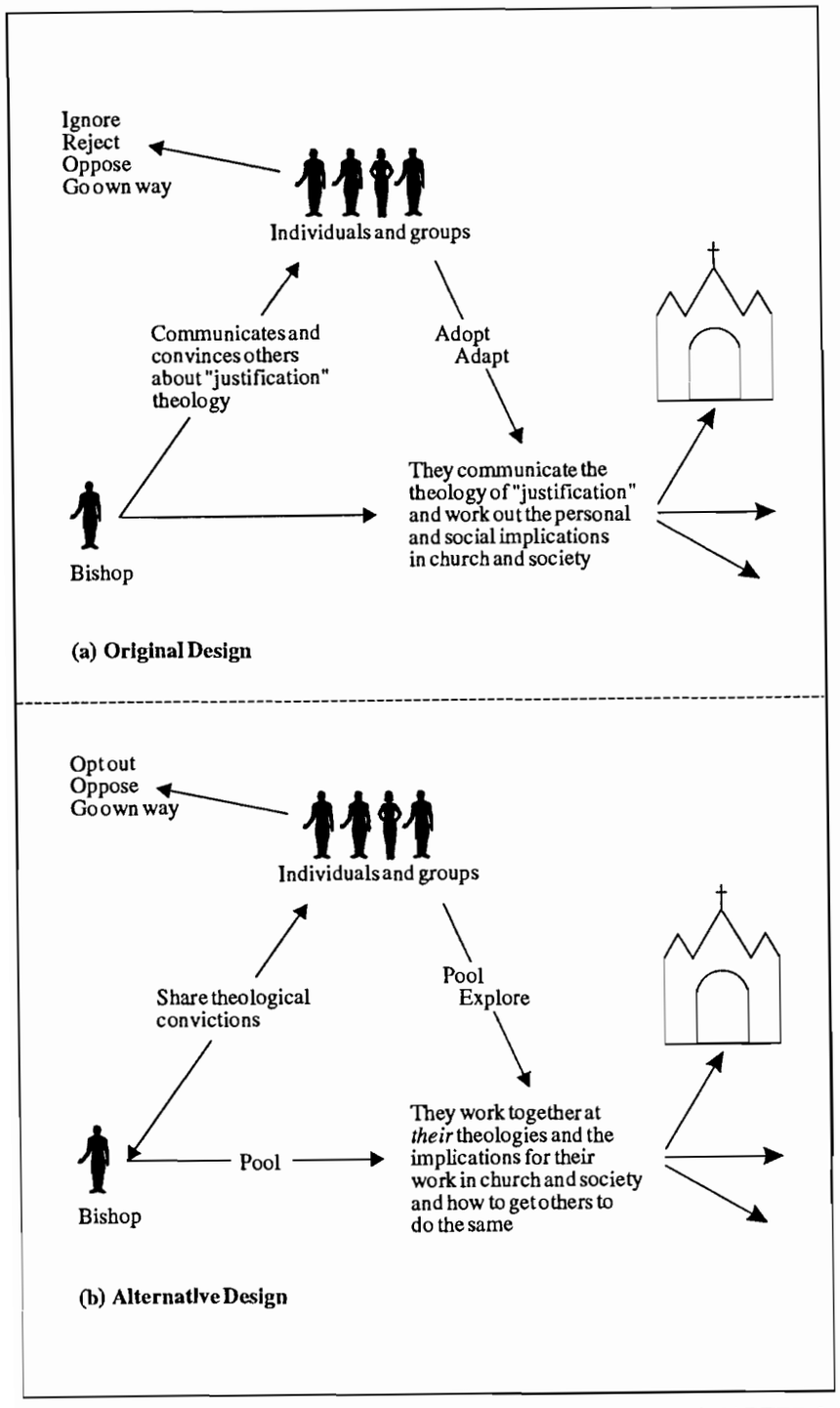

FIGURE 6:2. DESIGNS OF THEOLOGICAL PROJECTS IN CHAPTER 3

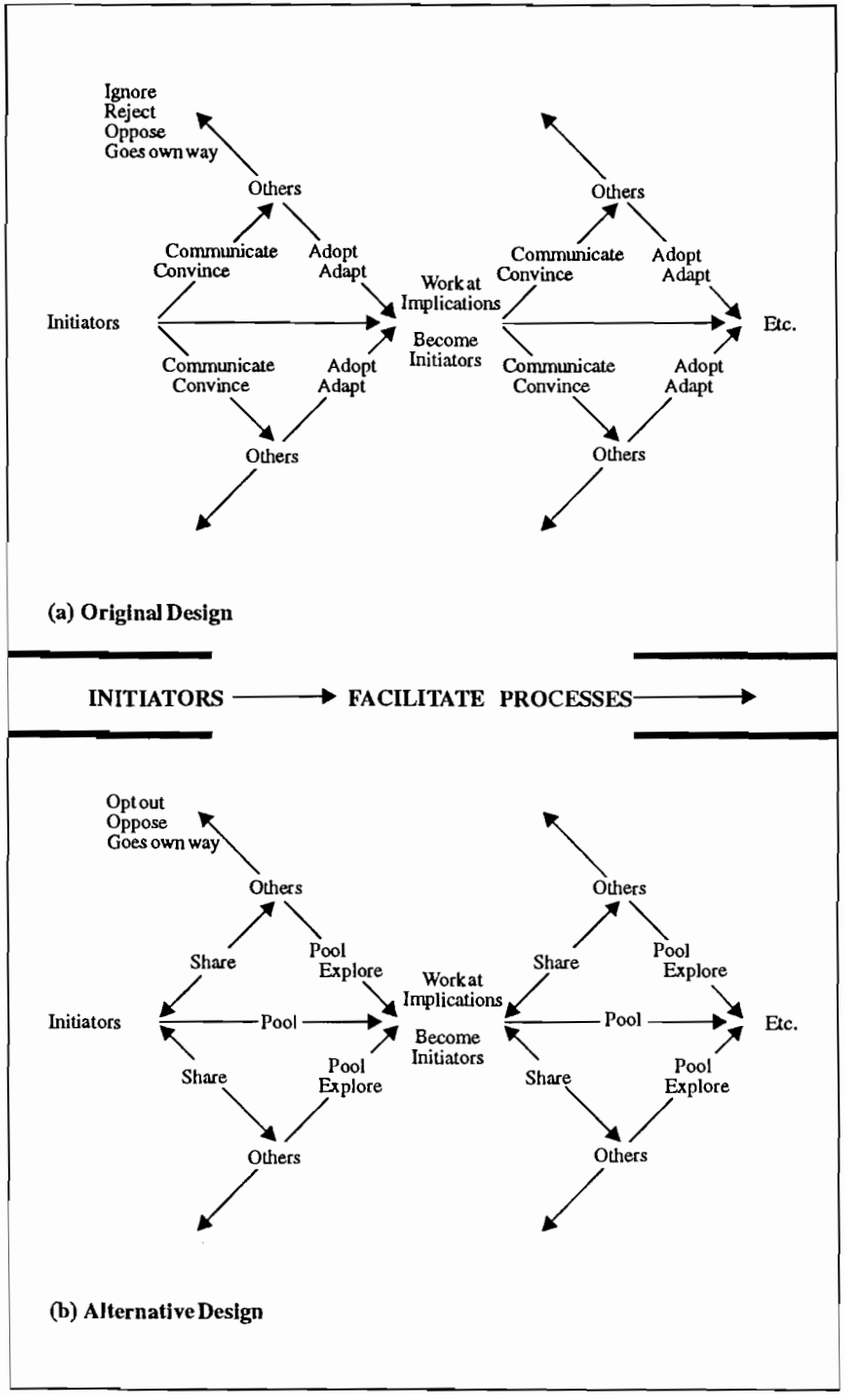

FIGURE 6:3. GENERAL SCHEMATIC PRESENTATION OF DESIGNS IN CHAPTER 3

VI. CREATIVE NATURE OF DESIGNING

Arthur Koestler summarizes so much of what I have been trying to say in this chapter. He captures the creative nature of designing in this quotation taken out of his context and placed in mine:

> The creative act is not an act of creation in the sense of the Old Testament. It does not create something out of nothing; it uncovers, selects, re-shuffles, combines, synthesizes already existing facts, ideas, faculties, skills.[17]

To engage in this kind of creativity three activities must be brought together to form a causal triangle: analysing, synthesizing and designing. Together they form a powerful nucleus in all forms of church and community work. I express them diagrammatically in Figure 6:4.

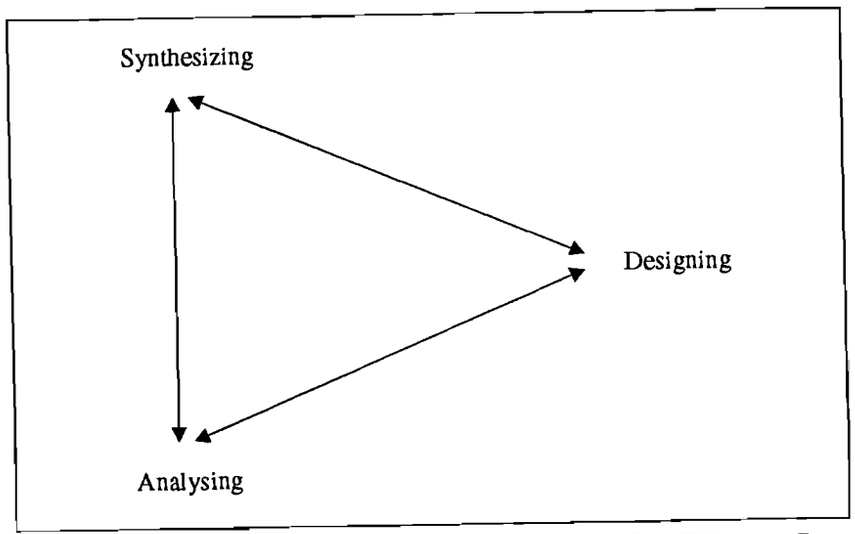

FIGURE 6:4. A CREATIVE NUCLEUS: ANALYSING, SYNTHESIZING AND DESIGNING

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Schon, Donald A., *Educating The Reflective Practitioner: Towards a New Design for Teaching and Learning in The Professions* (San Francisco & Oxford: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1987), p. 41.

2. My experience is similar to that of secular agencies, according to a report prepared for the Department of the Environment by URBED (Urban and Economic Development) Ltd.: *Managing Urban Change: A Report on the Management Needs of Urban Programme Project Managers* (HMSO, 1988). "In both local authority and voluntary projects, problems often arise from the initial design .... One conclusion we drew from these case studies was that many of the problems encountered later on could be traced back to inadequate initial planning.... Thus good planning at the start of a project is extremely important." Planning here is near to what I mean by designing.

3. Other designs and models are given in: Lovell, George, *The Church and Community Development: An Introduction* (Avec Publication, 1972, 1992 reprint), pp. 8–13, 34, 42–55. Lovell, George & Catherine Widdicombe, *Churches and Communities: an approach to development in the local church* (Search Press, 1978), p. 25. Lovell, George, *Diagrammatic Modelling: An aid to Theological Reflection in Church and Community Development Work* (Avec Publication, 1980), p. 10. Lovell, George, *Human and Religious Factors in Church and Community Work* (Grail Publication, 1982), pp. 13, 25, 44, 51. See also Downes, Thomas, *The Parish as Learning Community* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1979), Chapter 1 and p. 97.

4. I owe this term to Allen Pincus and Anne Minahan: cf. Chapter 5, "A Model for Social Work Practice" in *Integrating Social Work Methods* National Trust SS Library 31 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1977), Specht & Vickery (eds), p. 83.

5. Bullock, Alan & Oliver Stallybrass, *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1977), p. 621.

6. Palazzoli, Mara Selvina *et al*, *The Hidden Games of Organizations* (New York: Pantheon, 1986) following Ferdinand de Saussure, p. 175.

7. Pincus & Minahan, *op. cit.* p. 87.

8. David N. Thomas's book *The Making of Community Work* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983) has some useful sections on community as a social system (pp. 46, 115, 296, 298–9 & 300–1).

9. Cf. *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* on "brainstorming".

10. *Use Your Head* (BBC, 1974), pp. 87 ff. It is also a way of making a record of a meeting. Cf. Widdicombe, Catherine, *Group Meetings That Work: A practical guide for working with different kinds of groups* (Slough: St Paul Publications, 1994), p. 50.

11. Cf. *The Use of Lateral Thinking* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 139. I have found Arthur Koestler's ideas about "thinking aside" and bisociative mechanisms very helpful: cf. *The Act of Creation* (London: Hutchinson, 1964).

12. Jeremiah 1:13f.

13. I owe this reference to discussions with Sister Majella O'Keefe about a seminar paper which she produced for the Avec/RIHE Diploma in Church and Community Development, October 1987: *Ways and Means of Analysing and Designing Programmes of Work With People.* For further information about the work of Gerard Egan see "Overview of a Practical Model of Organizational Change". (A new book is about to be published on this.)

14. Again I owe the idea of this perspective from discussions with Sister Majella O'Keefe (*op. cit.*). She was drawing upon the work of Gaston Berger, *The Methodology of Prospective Programming.*

15. *Mission Audit* (published by the General Synod for Mission and Unity of the Church of England, 1984): cf. pp. 38 f.

16. See the URBED Report quoted in note 2 above.

17. Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, p. 120.