CHAPTER EIGHT

# Using the Process

The processes of analysis and design described in this book are most likely to promote the holistic development of people and their environment when they are used to help workers:

— to think through things themselves;
— to determine how to help other people with whom they work to do the same.

These twin objectives are pursued in all the worked examples in Part One and suffuse the detailed discussion of the methodology. Achieving the first helps workers to be more effective agents of reflective action for the common good; achieving the second helps to create churches, organizations and communities that are more effective agents of reflective action for the common good. Creating such communities is important because reflective practitioners need reflective communities just as reflective communities need reflective practitioners. They go together. It is difficult for either to survive without the other. Communities of reflective agents are multipliers, they beget learning communities of reflective agents which foster human and spiritual growth and development. But being a reflective practitioner in community and generating reflective communities are difficult jobs. The processes I have described seem like a counsel of perfection when contrasted with the realities of the messy ways in which we think through things individually and collectively. The family case study graphically illustrates aspects of these realities with which we are all too familiar. The question we need to address is what—other than the things we have already described—will help us to use the analytical and design processes in working situations?

## I. WORKING PRIVATELY AND PUBLICLY

First, let us look at some of the relevant features of the settings and relationships within and through which we have to reflect and promote reflection. Some things we have to think through and work out privately. Other things we have to do publicly in groups, committees, councils, chapters, and various other kinds of meetings. That which we do privately can be done either on our own or with colleagues, co-workers, consultants and friends—some of whom we

work with publicly as well. Private work domains are closed systems, the boundaries of which are under the control of the participants and maintained through confidentiality. Public work domains are open systems. I represent these things diagrammatically in Figure 8:1.[1]

We are focusing on workers or practitioners so they are at the centre of all this. They are pivotal figures who embody within themselves their experiences of the domains that intersect and interact within them. The circular arrow around the central figure indicates that all the time, in private and in public, thoughts, ideas and feelings are pulsating through the worker's heart and mind. Some people refer to this as the "inner dialogue" or "self-talk". I prefer to call it "interior personal work" because we have to work at it in order to make our best contributions.

Sometimes this personal work is very rewarding and exciting. Things come together within us and make creative links between ourselves, our circumstances and those with whom we are working. At other times we simply cannot think straight. Feelings we cannot discipline and control prevent rational thought. This happens in the private and the public domains, when we are working on our own as well as when we are working with others. The family communion case study described the experiences most of us have from time to time when we just cannot work out within us how to respond to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Acting out of the inner confusion that this causes can be damaging. Much of this personal work, in private and in public, is, in fact, stewing over interpersonal relationships, experiences, and problems.

Diagrams of a similar kind can be drawn for every participant in any collective activity. Connecting up one or two of these diagrams quickly reveals the complexity of the interaction in collective thinking activities!

The diagram indicates the complexity of the systems within which we work things out but it does not do justice to them. They are dynamic, and classification tends to obscure this. The neatly ordered settings and patterns of thinking interact and interpenetrate. A telephone call suddenly breaks into the middle of our private work, drags us into the public arena and puts us on the spot possibly in relation to the very thing we were trying to sort out. Then again, what happened in the discussion with one group interacts positively or negatively with that in another (cf. the case study on children at communion).

Workers have to move between private and public and that involves crossing various physical, environmental, psychological and spiritual boundaries. They have also got to move from one way of thinking about things to another. At best there is a creative flow in the movement; at worst it undermines morale. At times, for instance, I find difficulty in settling down to work on my own on complex human issues in the solitary isolation of my study after a week with a group. I feel bereft of the richness of the interaction of the group and the assurance, confidence and mutual reinforcement that comes from joint decision-making. Faced with the difficulties of working alone, the advantages of being in a group loom large and I yearn to be back in that setting! On the other hand,



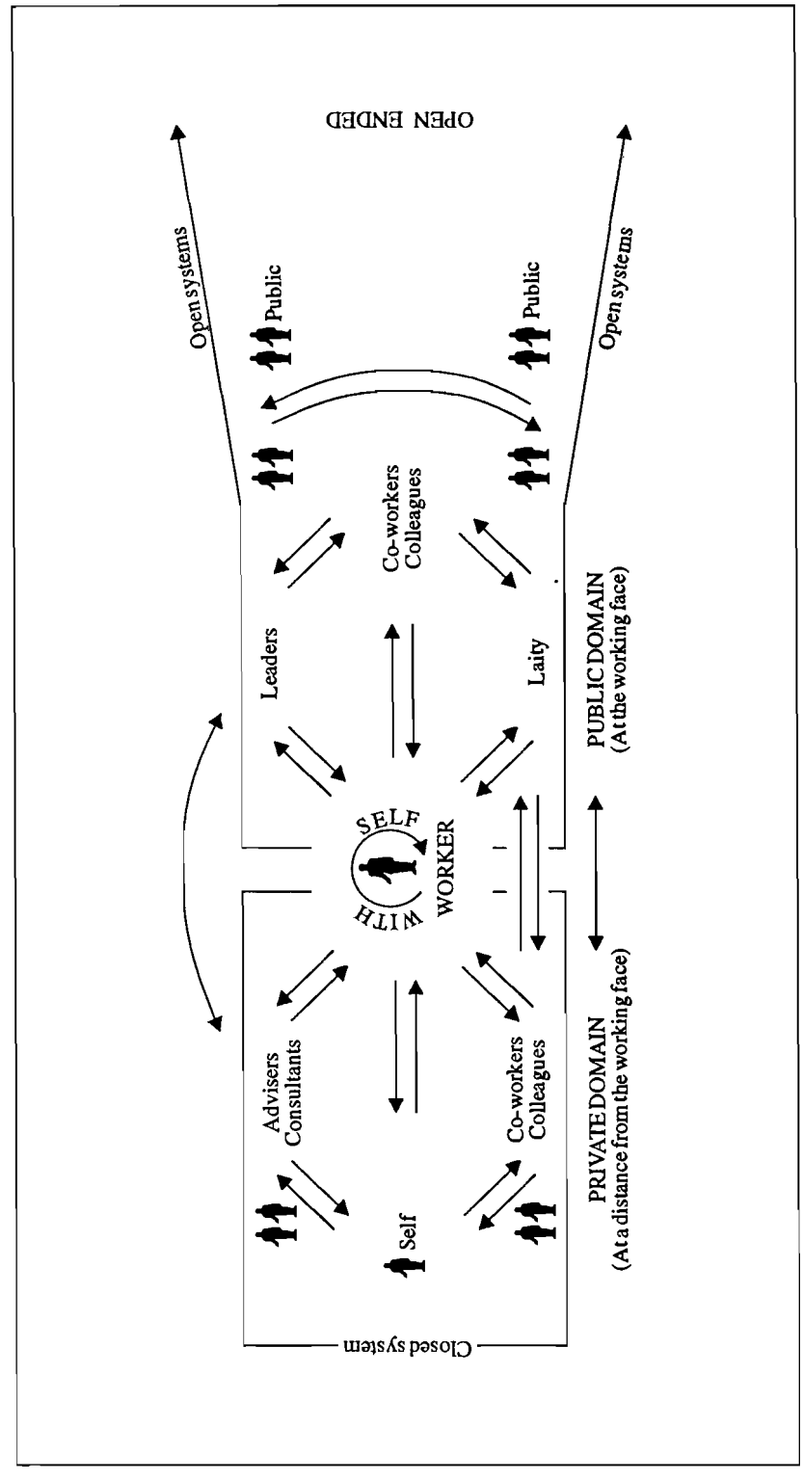



*FIGURE 8:1. PRIVATE AND PUBLIC WORK DOMAINS*

faced with an impasse in a group about a critical decision I can yearn for private work where I am "free" to think and decide on my own!

In both domains discussion can take place in formal groups and through informal exchanges and through what is said on the grapevines and networks. Rigorous thinking in formal groups equips people to discuss things more rigorously informally. And the formal thinking is most effective when it takes seriously what is being said informally. What happens on the networks seriously affects, for good or ill, developmental work carried out through formal groups. It can either enable or undermine projects and workers and leaders.

Churches and neighbourhood organizations become communities of reflective practitioners when as many people as possible are thinking things through, separately and together, in the various settings and relationships, in private and in public, and when their thinking jells to give a purposeful thrust to their endeavours towards the common good. I value the thinking processes already described because, as they can be used in all the settings and relationships, they make significant contributions towards creating such communities. They help all concerned to live, work and worship together. They provide a methodological common denominator. They create a unitive culture and spirituality.

## II. GENERATING COMMUNITIES OF REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONERS

Much has already been said about how to use these processes in private and in public. What follows helps us to use them to generate communities of reflective practitioners.

### 1. Taking Each Person's Contribution seriously

In the kind of communal work situations we are considering, participants, including the workers, can think about:

(a) their own experiences, thoughts, ideas, feelings, etc.;

(b) what others think and feel about their (the participant's) thoughts and feelings;

(c) other people's experiences, thoughts, ideas, feelings, etc.;

(d) what they think about other people's experiences, thoughts, etc.;

(e) the systemic interaction between (a) to (d);

(f) the shared ideas that emerge as "our" thinking.

All the work described in Part One was effective because it generated this comprehensive pattern of thinking. Commonly, but mistakenly, the non-



directive approach is associated exclusively with getting people individually and collectively to think about their own thoughts. Without in any way detracting from the importance of doing this, some developments will take place only when people think seriously about the ideas of others including those of their workers. The non-directive approach and the analytical processes described in this book make vital contributions towards promoting and facilitating the different aspects of thinking noted above. Promoting and engaging in this multi-faceted thinking involves workers, colleagues, co-workers and laity variously acting towards each other as consultants and consultors. (I develop this idea in Chapter Twelve.) Continual exchange of these roles contributes to the formation of learning communities by building up open networks of egalitarian and interchangeable working relationships. In turn this makes for well-equipped, cohesive and flexible communities of reflective practitioners.

### 2. Workers intervening, engaging, withdrawing, waiting and returning

Helping other people, individuals and groups, to think through aspects of their work involves continual cycles of action: intervening, engaging, withdrawing, waiting, returning, intervening ... and so on.

Directive and non-directive action are two forms of **intervention and engagement.**[2] Both are necessary. They are equally direct and forthright. Directive action must be responsible, loving and caring—not arrogant, autocratic and dictatorial; non-directive action must be warm, compassionate and close—not clinically cold and distant. Neither directive nor non-directive action is *ipso facto* right or wrong: doing too much *for* or *with* people can inhibit development, as can doing too little *for* or *with* people. Both approaches are necessary because, if we are to live and develop, some things must be done *for us*, some things must be left for us to do *for ourselves* and *with others* and some things we will only be able to do if someone works *with us*, alongside us.

Choices have to be made continually between approaches in relation to reference points and circumstances.[3] Changes and development in people and circumstances make previous choices of approach inappropriate, dysfunctional or disastrous. For example, what it was appropriate for an adult to do *for* a child of five may be highly inappropriate for a child of twelve. Requests for a fixed formula for choice of approach must be resisted. Questions that help me are:

What must I do *for* these people at this time and in this situation?

What must I do alongside them, *with them*?

What must we do *together*?

What must I leave them to do *for themselves* and *with each other*?

How can I get into the appropriate mode of interaction—by, for example,

simply adopting what I consider to be an appropriate mode or by negotiating?

How must I withdraw so that my waiting and returning promote processes of development?

The questions are universally relevant; the answers, and therefore the action to be taken and the leads to be given, vary enormously from one situation to another and as people grow.

Withdrawal is a critical part of helping others to think. People often indicate the need for withdrawal by saying things like: "I need to think about that". "I must let that go through my mind". "I want to sleep on it". "I need time to mull that over". What people are saying through these statements is: "I cannot think any further with you or in your presence". Workers who do not respect or anticipate these requests inhibit further thought and block processes of development. Judging, sensing and negotiating the moment of withdrawal—either through physically leaving or dropping the subject—is an art to be cultivated.

A friend of mine, ex-public school and Oxbridge, was a member of a small team of people with similar backgrounds servicing working-class tenants' associations scattered over a large metropolitan area. To their consternation, after a very busy and productive initial period they found that they were simply not being used by the tenants. Eventually the chairman of the associations told them why they were not now being used. "You come. You are very helpful. But you do not know when we want you to go so that we can talk in our own way about what you've said. And we don't know how to tell you to go without being rude. If you were one of us we would know just what to say." An understanding was reached that when tenants had "finished" with the worker they would say so without ceremony, "That's all we need you for, John". This changed the whole pattern of relationships. The team was inundated with work.

Much of the skill is so to withdraw that people and workers feel free to approach each other as and when they feel the need to do so. This can be facilitated through establishing a mutual understanding about "withdrawing" and "re-entry" when establishing working relationships. (I have wasted a lot of nervous energy fretting over whether or not to approach people who have not got in touch when they said they would!)

So far the process has been discussed in terms of the action of a worker in relation to other people. When people of their own volition start to approach each other in these ways, the momentum of the development process is greatly enhanced. Seeing people become "workers" to each other and to the worker is humbling and exciting.

The engagement we have been thinking about is analysing and designing work programmes and projects and studying cases and problems. But it could be thinking through all kinds of human situations. Waiting, or what I like to



call work-waiting, is the period when workers have to let others get on with their work freely, in their own way and in their own time. It is hard for workers to do this and to resist the temptation to interfere when they have nurtured the work, invested a lot of effort in it, taken it to their hearts and when they are anxious about its success and how things are going. However this may be, effectiveness depends upon waiting in patience and returning at the right moment.

Strangely, one of the things that helps me to recall the importance of waiting, and of enduring it, is a scene that comes into my mind of a master craftsman, a plasterer, waiting for the plaster or cement to get to a particular point in setting before smoothing or polishing it or adding another layer. Nothing, just nothing, would make him take premature action. My amateurish efforts in this and other similar things are frequently marred because I simply do not wait for the materials to do their own work—in my impatient indiscipline I add more plaster prematurely! When working with people the waiting time is variously circumvented. Workers return to "put things right" or to check on what is happening. Sometimes they act upon the questionable assumption that "it is easier and quicker to do it yourself than to wait for them". Others try to take short cuts by resorting to directive and autocratic action. Time is saved in the short term at the cost of development in the long term. People need *their* time to do *their* work. Workers simply must wait upon people. The work we did with the bishop and Father Patrick Doyle shows the value of their working with a group, withdrawing to do their private and personal work, and returning to share their most recent ideas.

W.H. Vanstone, in his quite remarkable book *The Stature of Waiting*, has greatly helped me to understand the theological and practical significance of waiting through his exposition of Jesus' "waiting" ministry after the betrayal.[4] Dr Gillian Stamp has produced two very useful models which help me to understand and negotiate the "withdrawal" and "waiting" in managerial working relationships. The first is what she describes as the "tripod of work" formed by three activities, "tasking, trusting and tending", in contradistinction to "handing over, mistrusting and controlling".[5] The second is a "triad of trust" which exists when the worker *trusts* his/her own judgement, the organization *trusts* the worker's judgement and when workers are *entrusted* with the purposes of the organization.[6] I have been helped to see just how to withdraw through delegating by a step-by-step process outlined by Andrew Forrest.[7]

Returning starts a new round of the cycle.

### 3. Commitment of Workers to Private Work

It is essential that workers commit themselves to private work, to short- and long-term preparation. The quality and effectiveness of all public work depends upon it. Hard private thinking is required of workers if they are to use the processes described in this book publicly to good effect and make their

unique contribution to the thinking processes—they have, for instance, a perspective on the church/organization as a whole and information about it which no one else has. Getting this in a form which others in the organization can handle can take quite a bit of private work.

Over many centuries much effort has gone into helping ministers and priests to get the balance right between preparation and practice in relation to preaching and conducting worship, and between studying and visiting. Less effort has gone into getting the balance right between preparing to work with people and working with them. More effort has gone into the what and how of working face-to-face with people than into preparing to do so.

Several reasons can be advanced for this neglect. Preparing to work with people is notoriously difficult, especially done on one's own. Amongst other things it involves grappling with questions such as: precisely what is happening between the people in this situation, and how can I conceptualize and analyse it? How should I introduce this idea or that, to whom, when and in what order? Should I be doing this or that *for* or *with* them or should I leave them to do it by and for themselves? How can I help them to think through these things profitably in the very limited time and energy they have available at the end of a busy day in the middle of a demanding week? Getting people to think for themselves—especially about things they need to think about but do not want to—is more demanding than thinking about things for them.

Some priests with whom I worked steadfastly resisted private work because they said, "thinking things through privately on our own can move us on too fast and break down feelings of 'us' and 'ours' created by joint work between clergy and laity".[8] They wanted to do everything with the laity. They argued that in order to be non-directive and to avoid subtle manipulation it is necessary to start together with the people where they are. I am entirely sympathetic to the aim but my own experience has been that initiating non-directive work programmes requires careful planning if people and workers are to have the necessary freedom to engage with each other and do the things that they need and want to do. Preparation facilitates the use of non-directive group work skills and it also helps in another way. Having clarified my own purposes and ideas and gathered relevant information, I find that I give myself much more freely to others in the tasks of helping them to do their thinking. In short, using the processes myself on what I have to do is creative preparation for using them with others.

Another reason for the neglect of private work, especially study and research, is that it is the public work towards which workers' aims, thoughts, ideas and preparation point.[9] It calls them in demanding ways and quickly seduces them from private work possibly because it is public work to which they are predisposed. All this is reflected in the common practice of workers' entering time into their diaries for public work but not for the private work necessary to prepare for it and to follow it through.

Private work is all too easily squeezed out.



**4. Commitment to thinking Things through time and again with Different Groups**

Developing communities of reflective practitioners involves thinking things through time and again with individuals and groups as well as thinking things through in private. Both commitments are required. Sometimes it involves thinking things out from first principles with group after group and then getting all concerned to think about what has emerged. At other times it involves a worker or group thinking their way through something and then submitting their thinking for critical scrutiny to other people. This may have to be done in stages. Group one thinks about the initial ideas. Group two thinks about the ideas and the suggestions of group one and so on. Doing this is quite different from getting people to accept or adopt *in toto* the thinking of the first group. When it is not possible for everyone to think things out from first principles they can think about provisional plans in relation to their reference points and make profound observations. People can appraise things they could not design or build.

Biddle and Biddle[10] worked out a useful developmental process which involved starting with a basic nucleus of people who worked on some ideas for development and gradually formed a larger nucleus by working through their ideas with successive groups of people.

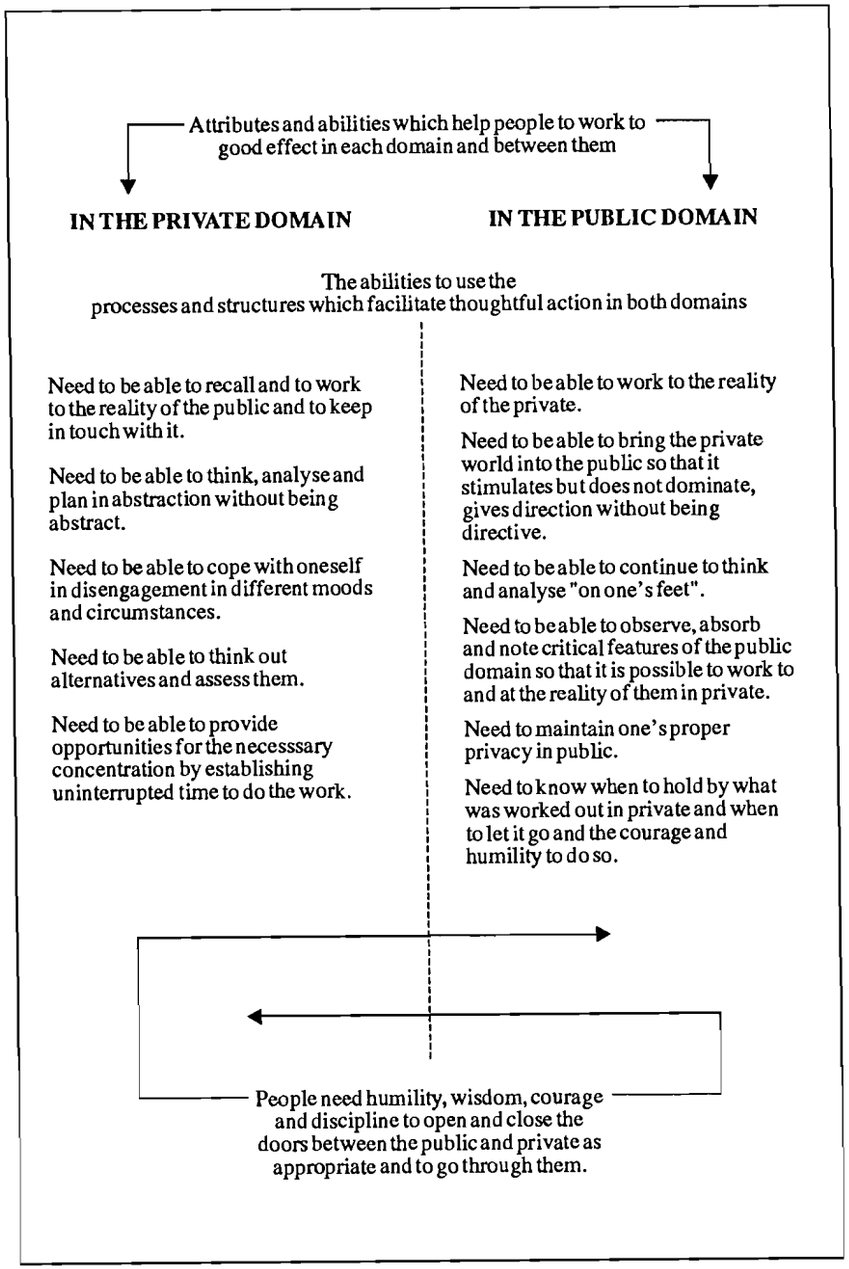
Using the same structures, processes, approaches and methods at each stage gives shape to the process. A key to the success of this sequential thinking is designing a critical path that enables one group to build upon and develop the thinking that has gone on before. We saw how this process went wrong in the family case study (Chapter One). The critical path has to be "managed"; generally speaking, this is a worker's job.

By the very nature of churches, organizations and religious orders, things are thought through in many different ways, relationships and formal and informal settings before conclusions are reached. Consequently discussions do not have a smooth run through a neat, discrete series of predetermined stages. They are stop-start, bitty, and discontinuous as one group or meeting after another has a go at thinking things through from this angle and that. In contrast to these actualities, the sequences I have set out in an orderly way in this book could appear to be a counsel of perfection. That may be, but for me it is a useful foil which helps me to put purposeful order and shape into discussions or series of discussions in different settings and relationships. It is also like a map; it helps me to see where a particular discussion fits into all that has to be done to think through something profoundly and comprehensively.

**5. Acquiring the Ability to work in Private as well as in Public**

Earlier I indicated some of the differences between the private and the public working environments. Examining the similarities and differences in more detail would be fascinating and illuminating. But here I must restrict myself to

some of the things that contribute to working effectively in each domain, to being able to bridge the divide between them and to being able to move from one to the other. Abilities needing to be cultivated are listed in the chart below.




*DISPLAY 8:1. ATTRIBUTES AND ABILITIES REQUIRED TO WORK IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC DOMAINS*



**6. Managing the Transition from the Personal and Private to the Public**

Teilhard de Chardin said that "the passage from the individual to the collective is the critical problem of human energy".[11] I venture to add that the reverse journey is a critical problem too. Making these journeys involves opening doors between the private and public, the personal and interpersonal and going through them, and that requires humility, wisdom, courage, discipline and various props and aids. It also calls for judgement in deciding what is apposite to each domain and in maintaining socio-religious systems that are appropriately open/closed, public/private, closed/open and private/public. In any relationship it is essential to provide for togetherness and privacy; they are the hallmarks of good community.

The "passage from the individual to the collective" involves crossing many boundaries as we move from the private to the public and from one group to another. Some of these boundaries are physical, others are psychological, cultural and environmental. They relate to belonging and to the ways in which people do things. Being conscious of these boundaries helps me to prepare to cross them.[12]

The aim is to get a creative interaction, positive meshing and engagement, between the private and public and between the personal and interpersonal work; between thinking things out within yourself, "self-talk", and talking things out with others. Many things can impede such processes. Talking before and without thinking is one of them. Another is the withholding of thoughts until they have matured and been tested. A very highly intelligent member of a group with which I worked created a bad dynamic because of his long silences. People became progressively more anxious to know what he was thinking. Eventually he told us that he thought everything through several times before he shared his thinking because he was prepared to do so only when he felt that his thinking could not be faulted. His approach meant that he had opted out of what the other members of the group were doing, thinking things through together aloud. He was pursuing, in parallel, and not in sequence, a separate line of thought and contributing conclusions. That of course can be most productive, provided that it does not prevent the others from doing *their* thinking and break down the relationships between people. Getting the balance right between thinking aloud and thinking your own thoughts is a matter of judgement, timing, skill, confidence and of your willingness to give yourself to others and to be vulnerable.

For Christians this process is even more complicated when they are trying to discern the will and mind of God in relation to the matters under consideration.

**7. Using the Process in all Settings and Relationships**

Using suitable adaptations of the processes illustrated and described in Parts One and Two in all the settings and relationships has many advantages. It

— helps to objectify things, to handle affective content, to be realistic and to work at things systematically;

— provides a common format for community thinking;

— helps to handle the private in public and vice versa;

— helps people to think about their own and each other's ideas;

— legitimizes private, personal and shared public thinking;

— helps the transfer and the cross-reference of thinking from one setting, working relationship and domain to another.

## III. TOWARDS ACQUIRING THE ABILITY TO USE THE PROCESS IN COMMUNITY

Whichever way you look at it, pursuing these processes is hard work. Reading about them can be intimidating. It all seems so complicated. Most people can and do willingly co-operate in the use of these processes when someone else is acting as worker/consultant. They do so gladly even though it can be demanding when they feel they are getting somewhere. Most of us continue to need someone to help us to think through things. Nevertheless, a desirable development is that people acquire the ability to use the processes themselves and gain the comparative analytical autonomy that goes with it. Some people take to the approach quite naturally and are soon using it themselves: frequently the process gives shape and order to that to which they already aspire. Other people have to make significant changes in their style of working in order to adopt this approach. Personal and private changes have to be accompanied by public and corporate changes in working relationships and methods. To attempt to make these changes with confidence people need to be assured that the processes are theologically sound, that they do not compromise their beliefs about such things as inspiration, and being "open to the leading of the Spirit". These questions are discussed later in the book when we have considered the underlying theory and theology of the approach (see Chapters 9 and 10). Here we confine ourselves to one or two suggestions about how to acquire the necessary skills. Again, I list them for economy in presentation. It is possible to acquire the abilities through:

- learning about processes and getting the feel of them, by observing, experiencing and evaluating other people using them in courses and work consultancy sessions;
- working as an apprentice or colleague with someone experienced in using them;
- adopting a piece-meal approach to acquiring the skills; (To learn and to improve one's performance of any complex sequence of operations it is necessary to concentrate on parts of it, and especially those parts with which we find most difficulty: it might be analysing or designing or deciding; or it might be a common element such as asking questions or recording observations with greater accuracy. Then it is necessary to build the skills together. This is the way in which I have acquired what ability I have.)
- studying worked examples (as we do in Part One) and doing case-study exercises; (I learnt a lot by analysing cases very much as I learnt about mathematics by doing exercises.[13])
- using basic formulations of the process such as the approach to problem-solving and case studies; (These two methods lend themselves to unobtrusive use. They pave the way to using more complicated structures and to designing your own.)
- working things out on paper as well as in your head and through the spoken word; (As I have said, I have learnt an enormous amount about these procedures by writing up records of what happened in programmes of work and analysing them at my leisure.)
- working with colleagues as co-workers to implement these ideas and to help each other towards improved performance through mutual support and criticism;
- corporate management of the process.

These learning methods are a combination of studying the processes themselves; of exploring their application to the private and public domains through worked examples and doing exercises; of direct experience of the processes without having primary responsibility for them; of trying them out in the private and in the public domains in partnership with others and on your own and evaluating progress. The learning is by study, experience, practice, trial and error, analysis and osmosis. At first progress may be slow and use of the methods ponderous if not gauche. They are assimilated through reflective practice. Gradually it becomes second nature to work at things in this way.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. This diagram is a revision of one I put in *Human and Religious Factors in Church and Community Work* (A Grail Publication, 1982), p. 44.

2. For an exposition of the approaches see Batten, T.R. & M., *The Non-Directive Approach* (Avec Publication, 1988), and Lovell, George, *The Church and Community Development—An Introduction* (Grail Publications/Chester House Publications, 1972).

3. The Battens, *op. cit.*, have a useful chapter on "Factors Affecting Choice".

4. I got many of the ideas about "waiting" from Canon W.H. Vanstone's book, *The Stature of Waiting* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982). Also, I got the idea of "work-waiting" from Vanstone's use of "social-waiting", i.e. the time spent on waiting upon the arrangements and convenience of others (cf. p. 46).

5. A Brunel Institute of Organization and Social Studies (BIOSS) Occasional Paper, *The Tripod of Work*, February 1987.

6. *Well-being & Stress at Work* by Gillian Stamp. BIOSS Occasional Paper, September 1988, p. 2.

7. *Delegation: Notes for Managers 19* (The Industrial Society, 1971, reprinted 1976). See particularly p. 12.

8. Cf. Lovell, George, *Human and Religious Factors in Church and Community Work*. pp. 44 ff.

9. Thomas, David, *The Making of Community Work* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), throws light on the nature of the change to be made by church and community workers by comments he makes about community workers:

> Mosley came to the opinion that "people working in the field of community development place little value upon formal evaluative research, and show in their writing little awareness of the thought habits which its practice encourages" (1971). These thought habits are easy to recognise but difficult to define. There is a certain quality that one finds in the thinking of good researchers and statisticians. It is a cautious, analytic style, a little clinical but certainly rigorous, and an ability to ask questions that startle previously held assumptions. It is a questioning, objective, take-nothing-for-granted approach. Community workers, on the other hand, are enthusiastic, committed, passionate, partisan and subjective when it comes to their own work and that of community groups. And so they should be. (p. 266.)

10. Biddle, William W. & Loureide Biddle, *The Community Development Process: The Rediscovery of Local Initiative* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965). There is brief reference to the process in their book *Encouraging Community Development: A Training Guide For Local Workers* (1968).

11. I owe this quotation to David Thomas, *The Making of Community Work*, p. 289.

12. The introduction to the following book gives a most revealing account of the kind of boundaries that people working with communities have to cross: Henderson, Paul, David Jones and David Thomas (eds.), *The Boundaries of Change in Community Work*, National Institute of Social Services Library No. 37 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980).

13. The following books give worked/unworked examples and case studies of the processes described in this book.

> Batten, T.R., with the collaboration of Madge Batten, *The Human Factor in Community Work* (London: OUP, 1965).
>
> Batten, T.R. with the collaboration of Madge Batten, *The Human Factor in Youth Work* (London: OUP, 1970). Out of print but available from some libraries.



Lovell, George & Catherine Widdicombe, *Churches and Communities: An Approach to Development in the Local Church* (Tunbridge Wells: Search Press, 1978).

Lovell, George, *An Action Research Project to Test the Applicability of the Non-Directive Concept in a Church, Youth and Community Centre Setting* (thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Institute of Education, Faculty of Arts, University of London, 1973). Unpublished.