

Toward Intercultural Competency through Action Methods

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Outline

In this presentation I would like to cover the following points:

- Interculturality as critically important for our time.
- Defining and explaining interculturality.
- The US Church and interculturality.
- My background and role carrying interculturality forward with action methods.
- The importance of “action methods” in fostering interculturality.
- How Culture-Drama, Sociodrama and Psychodrama are interrelated.
- How Sociodrama and Culture-Drama are being used to facilitate interculturality.
- How they might be used to facilitate intercultural competency in the US Church.
- Future focus for using sociodrama and culture-drama.

Interculturality is critically important for our time

As the globe shrinks at an ever increasing rate, we find ourselves rubbing shoulders with one another in socially confined quarters. Territorial boundaries and time factors are no longer buffers against the resulting chaffing, strain and conflict. Time in our shrinking globe also seems to have condensed and accelerated. The slowly turning wheels of assimilation are no longer viable as cultural diversity becomes a powerful tool for political enfranchisement. Businesses, churches, schools, hospitals, social institutions and associations of every sort are experiencing the strain of cultural pluralism and we desperately need to deal with this as a nation and a globe. As interculturality expert, Milton Bennett, says, we need the tools to become interculturally competent.

Ideas of Milton Bennett

Building on the work of anthropologist Edward Hall, whose book *Silent Language*, caught the attention of intercultural sojourners, Bennett theorized that there are six stages of development toward intercultural competency and that progression along these stages can be taught and learned. He calls the process “the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity” (DMIS). The stages are: Denial, Defense, Minimize, Accept, Adapt, Integrate. Some of his colleagues (Hammer et al.), have condensed these to five. Bennett sought ways to get beyond our inborn ethnocentrism to what he calls “ethnorelativism”. He asked, what will enable us to be more sensitive to cultural differences, to understand and value these differences, and to learn how to adapt to them and benefit from them. He understood that we need new tools that will enable us to do this and he sought them out.

Out of this thinking Bennett has brought forward three important advances. His first is coming up with an intercultural communication mode. He starts by asking, how do we communicate with others across cultural world views? We can't if we are not somehow on the same ground. Geert Hofstede, another intercultural thinker, following up on the work of anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn who focused on value differences, answers this by creating an etic structure for

comparing one culture to another, especially in terms of their differences. His most well-known example contrasts individualism and collectivism. For example, individualist vs. collectivist proverbs: “Blessed be the child who makes it on its own” (individualism), as opposed to: “The rafter that sticks out is the first to rot” (collectivism). We commonly make cultural generalizations, e.g., Chinese are collectivist and Americans are individualist. His intent is to offer constructive categories for understanding—not for finding absolute truth—and for guiding our communication. But it is not as simple as that. Such oppositional thinking does not account for “code shifters” who are able to go back and forth. We need a broader construct that allows us to see differences and to help us make sense of the other culture and adapt. Bennett says we need to go beyond those approaches based solely on cultural difference. We need to construct more adaptive categories for communication.

Bennett’s Theory of Intercultural Communication

Bennett’s theory of intercultural communication has added to Edward Hall by taking the cultural perspective of the other seriously, i.e., empathization (taking their perspective) which is to be distinguished from “sympathy” (which takes a position and judges from that position). He offers the following example of this: John tries to understand Ali. John imagines how Ali must be or creates a facsimile of Ali and Ali in turn imagines how John must be thinking about things, and creates a facsimile of him. The attempt at interaction takes place between the facsimile positions not between John and Ali per se. John says let me think about Ali in terms of how I imagine John is to Ali. And Ali does the same with his facsimile. Bennett wishes to move beyond facsimiles to realities. Incidentally, this is what action methods do—they move us to cultural “truths,” as we shall see below.

Intercultural communication occurs when both are trying to do this at the same time. The outcome is influenced by a number of factors including one’s culture, one’s experience of other cultures and of one’s own personality. And when both are doing it together, the interaction generates a “third culture.” Proctor and others refer to what happens when people attempt mutual adaptation. John and Ali are constructing the third culture position. It is a constructivist model. The value of diversity does not come from John and Ali just being there in front of each other, or from Ali who is good at understanding John. But the true value of diversity is where you have the synergy of differences present, both adapting and generating a third position which gives the value.

The second major step forward offered by Bennett is in the area of cultural identity, i.e., who you are as a participant in a cultural context. We can have such a thing as a multi-level cultural identity, i.e., a hybrid cultural identity. Interculturalists recognize that there are people out there with expanded world views repertoire. They can operate in any number of other cultures at least a little bit. The more one operates in these different worldviews the more they start to become part of who you are. They form you. For example, I am socialized to operate within a West Coast American middle class world and several worlds in West Africa. Over 36 years it has become part of who I am. I can live either way. I am all of it—not just American or African. I am identified externally as an American, and not an African, but I can operate quite adequately in both worlds. More and more people are beginning to define themselves in this way.

Unfortunately, there are many definitions of identity, and the culturally plural view specified here is uncommon. Psychologists have all along been trying to define identity in terms of a single world view. And they are extremely influential here in the USA. Now we need to help psychologists to see how people can have multiple identities—which is not to be confused with the disorder of multiple personalities which is characterized dissociated personality states that alternately control a person's behavior.

A third contribution concerns the process of becoming intercultural competent. Process is important because it makes learning possible. It depends entirely on two things: our experience of cultural difference and having a model that takes us progressively along a movement, determined by our own ability, from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. This is Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) mentioned above. Intercultural development is not a magically transformative experience where the scales drop from your eyes and you suddenly become ethnorelative. One needs to go through stages that support the experience of cultural difference. Structures are necessary; otherwise we stay ethnocentric, focused on our own small worlds. This developmental process is a major contribution to "interculturality" because once we have a process we have a roadmap for learning.

The US Church and Interculturality

The US Church, in particular, needs to take a leadership role in intercultural relations because it is bound up in God's Mission for today's world—a mission which the Church has committed itself to serve. Fr. Allan Deck SJ, in his role as former director of the USCCB Office of Cultural Diversity in the Church, identified this need: "Today as ever the Church's mission to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and promote the life and dignity of each and every human being has much to do with insight into cultures." The awareness has come through the demographic shift in the USA "as Hispanics, Asians, Caribbean people, Africans and many other communities of non-European origin are on the rise." God's Mission here is not to "Americanize" but to evangelize. "This," says Deck, "means respecting the languages, customs and style whereby particular cultures live their Catholic faith while seeking to form their emerging Catholic identity in light of the Word of God and Church teaching." But how is this to be done? We need to begin with ourselves and our own intercultural competencies. A number of Dioceses (e.g. San Bernardino's BICM) have already begun to take up this challenge. As an SVD devoted to God's Mission, I would like to facilitate it using SD and CD.

I am working with SVDs heading an *ad hoc* work group established to develop the context and format of a set of modules that could be adapted for our post-Chapter SVD use. This is in response to point B3 of our 2012 General Chapter, "Resources for Implementing the Intercultural Dimension," and its purpose is to investigate and develop the format and modules developing interculturality in the SVD. My first action in this committee will be to participate in a Milton Bennett workshop to see if and how Bennett's Intercultural Development Inventory (the six stages in moving from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism) (<http://www.idiinventory.com/>) could be adapted for SVD situations and for ministerial situations in general.

My background in the use of Action Methods

I was first introduced to the action methods of psychodrama and sociodrama in 1989 in Ghana when I worked with Dr. Gong, Shu, a well-known psychologist and psychodramatist, to help

resolve culture-based conflicts in religious communities. At this time such communities were roughly half Ghanaian and half expatriate Europeans, a fact which narrowed the cause of the problem to cultural differences. Later I used some of the techniques of psychodrama, especially role-playing and role-training in our cross-cultural introduction and internship courses at TICCS (Tamale Institute of Cross-Cultural Studies, www.ticcs.org). Then, in 2002 I organized an intensive seven-day workshop which brought together key members of two major tribal groups that had been involved in a prolonged ethnic conflict. The workshop which used action methods derived from psychodrama and sociodrama succeeded where other peacebuilding initiatives failed. And it generated a new kind of action method which I have termed “culture-drama”. The power and importance of this new method became clear to me over the next few years. I published a book on the subject and a number of articles describing it, and I resolved to do everything possible to launch it here in the USA.

When I returned to the USA to teach in 2008, I worked with Dr. Gong, Shu, whenever possible offering short workshops and seminars. But it soon became clear that I would need more professional training and credentials in psychodrama and sociodrama if I wanted to work on my own. This opportunity came after I moved from DC to California. Dr. Gong, Shu put me in touch with her former supervisor, Dr. Don Miller, who lived in nearby Redlands. He was a psychologist and a fully qualified psychodrama trainer, educator and practitioner (TEP), and he agreed to be my supervisor. Over the next three years I underwent training to become a certified practitioner of psychodrama, sociometry and group psychotherapy. This journey ended in Jan 2013 when I became a qualified as a Certified Practitioner (CP) in these fields.

A Psychodramatist's Training

The CP is equivalent to an MA degree and is granted by The American Board of Examiners in Psychodrama, Sociometry and Group Psychotherapy (<http://www.psychodramacertification.org/>). The Board is a professional body established to set the standards for professionals in these disciplines. It requires over 780 hours of training involving theory and practice, a strenuous review of credentials, and successfully passing both a written and an on-site examination. This qualifies the practitioner to offer psychodrama, sociodrama and sociometric workshops. Having completed this important juncture in my training I would like to offer my services for the needs of the US Church.

Why use Action Methods for Intercultural Competency?

There are many programs for intercultural competency training available: but didactics aren't enough. You can't learn another culture, or even about another culture fully in your own culture. We need to get beyond the “facsimiles” to real encounters. We need to challenge our stereotypes, presuppositions and assumptions through action—the original language of the body. We need to experience the other culture holistically: body, mind and intuition.

Culture-Drama and its roots in Psychodrama

The action method of culture-drama (CD) is derived from psychodrama (PD). In order to understand CD, therefore, we must go more deeply into PD. What is PD? J.L. Moreno (1889-1974), the founder of psychodrama, defined it as a science that “deals with interpersonal relations and private worlds”. CD deals with intercultural relations and shared cultural worlds or worldviews. PD is a science that explores the “truth” (the psychodramatic truth of the client) by

dramatic methods. “Truth” here refers to the truth of the protagonist, the subject of psychodrama. In CD it is the collective cultural truth of the protagonist culture by dramatic methods.

PD premises that each of us experiences the world a little bit differently from our neighbor of the same culture. While we live in a common physical world, each of us knows only our personal experience of it; each of us experiences the world a little bit differently from all our companions, from everybody else in the world. There is sufficient consensual agreement concerning the nature of the world—most of the time and for most people—to convince us that we are indeed sharing a common universe. This is what we generally refer to as reality. However, from person to person, there are considerable differences in the perception and interpretation of this reality. In this sense each of us lives in a singular world that is not quite like that of any other person. Truth, in Moreno’s definition of PD, is one’s unique perception of the world, of one’s place in that world, and of one’s relationships with the others who co-create that world.

Bringing in the cultural dimension, we can see that the experiences of people in different cultures are more than “a little bit” different; they are worlds apart. It is the “truth” of a culture that is the focus of CD. I would say that this comes down to the major cultural themes that distinguish one culture from another. It is based on the fact that each culture group lives in a singular world that is not quite like that of any other culture. “Truth” here is the unique communally shared perception of that world and of one’s place in it, and of one’s relationships with others who co-create that world.

The most important aspect of our world is the society in which we live, the people with whom we interact, our interpersonal relationships, and their relationships with each other. A PD is usually a dramatization of the interpersonal relationships of the protagonist as the protagonist perceives them. PD externalizes subjective material which resides internally—perceptions, memories, thoughts, emotions, fantasies, dreams, even hallucinations and delusions—giving all of these tangible form upon the psychodramatic stage. This permits the audience to perceive in a physical, concrete manner the protagonist’s subjective and usually invisible experience. More important, PD allows the protagonist, with the aid of the director and auxiliary egos, to explore his/her relationships in a more explicit way than is otherwise available. A common result is that protagonists’ perceptions of their worlds, of themselves in that world, and of their significant others is expanded and altered in ways that allow the protagonist to make sense out of what was here-to-fore unexplainable. In short, PD allows us to explore the world that we experience and to learn more about ourselves, others who are important to us and our relationships with them.

The psychodramatic method is a way of looking at and understanding subjective human experience. It includes a number of techniques which permits us to re-visit and re-enact past experiences, examine current relationships, and to explore dreams and fantasies and our expectations of what the future may bring. The PD director serves as guide, technician and dramaturge, helping the protagonist identify important internal processes and produce them in dramatic form. Members of the group aid by being auxiliary egos—stand-ins for absent significant others.

It is a systematic method, which means that it can be taught and learned. It is important to recognize this because initially PD often appears to be magical and that which occurs because of the method is attributed to personal characteristics of the director.

In short, PD is a method which utilizes guided dramatic action to examine problems or issues raised in a group, or in individual counseling. The director uses psychodramatic techniques to elicit maximal participation, understanding and support. In a classically structured psychodrama session, there are three distinct phases of group interaction—the warm up, the enactment, and the sharing. The director, a trained psychodramatist, has the responsibility for guiding the participants through each stage.

The Warm-Up

The warm-up may involve a general discussion of a structured exercise. The director helps the group members focus on a recurrent theme, or on a particular member's issue. He/she may choose or ask the group to select one of its members as the protagonist for an enactment. Either way, the protagonist's concerns usually bear directly on a sizeable number of group members.

The Enactment

The enactment dramatizes the protagonist's problem. The director initiates interactions between the protagonist and group members selected by the protagonist to play the roles of the significant others in his/her drama. The enactment is likely to continue until the protagonist achieves a shift in his/her perception of the problem and/or a new effective method of approaching it is tested.

The Sharing

During the sharing period, group members communicate the emotions and associations evoked by the enactment. Those who participate directly in the drama also share the feelings they experienced in the roles they played. Often these particular remarks have deep significance for the protagonist. The director has a responsibility to provide each group member with an opportunity for self-expression at a level commensurate with his/her interest and motivation within the time frame available to the group. This is usually achieved in the sharing portion.

Goals of PD

The principles of PD have evolved to embody the highest goals of social psychiatry, the creative arts and human potential for growth and fulfillment. Dr. Moreno believed that the role training obtained in the microcosm of the PD theatre would influence the wider context of daily human interaction. Practiced through the exercise of role reversal in PD, we would become sensitized to others, strengthening our capacity for empathy and effective responsible behavior. The overall result is a more compassionate and supportive environment sustained by institutions truly responsive to the human needs they serve.

Where and From Whom?

Although PD is usually considered to be a form of psychotherapy, and has been most widely applied in the mental health fields, psychotherapy is only one of its many functions. Psychodramatic methods and techniques are actively used in a broad range of mental health, educational and industrial environments throughout the world. PD is a powerful method for teaching, for training, for engendering creativity, as well as for conducting social and

phenomenological research. It is also an art form, a true version of drama. Whether for improving awareness, self-esteem, personal effectiveness or relationships, psychodrama has proven effective with low and high functioning populations.

It has been applied by:

- Mental health practitioners and trainers
- Marriage and family counselors
- Teachers and students
- The military
- Law enforcement personnel
- Business administration
- Employers and workers

It has been applied for:

- Psychiatric inpatients/ outpatients
- Psychotherapy clients
- Alcohol and drug patients
- The physically challenged
- Children and senior citizens
- Eating disorders, phobias, sexual abuse, rape
- Suicide and accident prevention
- Police training
- Effective education

At the TICCS internship program for pastoral year seminarians I applied these action methods to learning culture-specific ministries.

Sociodrama

In contrast to PD, sociodrama (SD) is “a group action method in which participants act out agreed-upon social situations spontaneously.” It helps people to express their thoughts and feelings, solve problems and clarify their values. It goes beyond simple discussion of problems and social issues. It gets people out of their chairs, exploring in action topics of keen interest to them. Then, as they explore the issues, they put themselves in other people’s shoes so as to understand themselves and the other better. It helps them “empathize” rather than just “sympathize” by tapping into the truth that we are more alike than different.

SD builds on this premise in concrete ways. It focuses on sameness. For example: All students study. All nurses at some point deal with dying patients. All police sometimes try to intervene in domestic disputes.

Members of a community may want to define and clarify values regarding an ethnic/moral issue. Members of a church congregation or religious community may want to clarify issues or...

- Decide on issues
- Define issues
- Clarify and Choose objectives
- Intervene in a dispute

Gain greater understanding (e.g., of an abuse victim's experience)
 Train themselves in a certain role aspects where uncomfortable
 Train for an interview, a meeting
 Train to become more playful and spontaneous
 Train to take more pleasure in their jobs

SD warmups lead participants into a topic which the enactment will explore. Participants volunteer or are selected for roles. The drama enactment is never scripted, always spontaneous. Afterwards there is a sharing in which members discuss the enactment, the solution or ideas it presented and sometimes new ideas for more SDs arise. During the sharing participants process and integrate what was shared in the action. This often leads to "homework," action in real life, practice of the new roles etc.

All these enactment modalities (PD, SD, CD) are holistic, right and left brain, kinesthetic, intuitive, affective and cognitive educational techniques. But, normally, only PD is intrapsychic. However, when a culture discovers the root of a recurring problem and the ineffective response to it embedded in its history, geography, or social cultural circumstances we are entering a collective intrapsychic realm, for example, one of the tribes of Northern Ghana was required to do intrapsychic work regarding its assumption that it had the right to enslave neighboring peoples.

Goals of PD, SD, CD

All action methods focus on a shared central issue. When a shared central issue (e.g., fear of failure/success) emerges from a warmup the director uses it in the enactment part. The objective is to resolve or find a solution to the central issue. Besides problem-solving—finding new and adequate solutions to old problems or old but still adequate solutions to new problems discovered through action—other goals of action methods include: satisfying act hunger, catharsis, action insight, and role-training.

- Act hunger: the director helps the participants to fulfill their strong drives to fulfill some needs or desires (e.g., act playfully, or assert one's independence).
- Catharsis: an expression of feeling, a cleansing, a release of tensions, removal of blocks.
- Insight: a new perception, understanding the other's truth (and one's own), clarify values.
- Role-training: behavior practice in a safe environment, to change one's behavior.

SD offers the most efficient safe method for achieving these goals and for obtaining information in the area of psychic emotional experience without undergoing the actual experience.

The difference between PD and SD can also be seen in terms of roles. There are two dimensions to the roles we play in life—those we share (common) and those that are our own (private). For example, the role aspects of Police Officer are both common and private:

- Common (SD): police give tickets, arrest suspects, attend to crime victims.
- Private (PD): every police officer has a unique way of performing these functions.

SD explores the collective components of role aspects (e.g., the difficulty of divorcees to resume dating; or in dealing with issues concerning the children). Such collective components are always a hypothetical situation exploring common issues. PD, on the other hand, explores private components, the real situation of an actual protagonist. The group helps him/her find satisfactory

ways of dealing with his/her problems. Both PD and SD deal with thoughts and feelings. But SD participants tap into a common problem and participants in the group join in to look at how they would deal with it.

CD is a more complex version of SD. Where SD explores sameness, culture-drama explores difference within sameness. For example, where SD explores the common roles of a Police Officer, such as “give tickets,” CD explores differences within the common role, such as how a Ghanaian Officer “gives tickets” by first waiting to receive “a dash” (a gift). It focuses on cultural difference regarding a common problem or issue (e.g., how culture A would perform the same role consistently in different way from culture B and why). During the sharing/processing mode the group can examine the cultural differences in dealing with a given common group problem. They may examine the advantages and disadvantages of these differences in different contexts, then seek adaptation goals and strategies, and finally examine role-training exercises to achieve satisfactory behavioral change toward what is in effect a new cultural ground or “third culture”. Here CD facilitates intercultural competency learning.

Both private (PD) and communal modalities (SD & CD) have the following outcomes in common:

- Focus on and facilitate human development
- Facilitate growth and change
- Lead to greater understanding of self and of the world
- Help to build proficiencies and skillfulness
- Build self-esteem
- Build confidence to feel better about selves
- Provide opportunities for people to interact and express thoughts and feelings
- Move toward evolution of the whole person

But the private mode (PD) can focus on both therapy and education while communal modes (SD and CD) usually focus only on education and training.

Differences: PD, SD and CD

As a therapeutic mode PD looks at the ways a person has become split off from others. Then, through therapy, helps to restore personal and social unity and reintegrates all aspects of his/her personality. A wounded part of the self leads to panic attacks, which in turn lead to one’s removal from the social sphere. The wounds need tending and nurturing. SD and CD rarely deal with intrapsychic issues. These belong to the private person and his wounds. In SD and CD the director is not engaged in helping a person work through his/her problems. As an educator he/she aids human development in a global way by communication, inspiration and transmission of information. He/she actively immerses the participants in the process. SD and CD participants are involved and impacted by the group process via the enactments that are important to everyone involved.

J.L. Moreno saw SD as focusing on three areas:

- It draws on our ability to learn holistically: using mind, body, and intuition.
- It draws on our creativity and spontaneously, and
- It focuses on solving a particular social problem by role exploration, role rehearsal and role expansion.

Moreno wanted to change the world into a more responsive, humane and compassionate society through SD techniques. SD follows the principles of group spontaneity and creativity in problem solving and exploring social behavior. Once new more adequate roles are explored through dramatic action they are rehearsed, expanded and “owned” by the group. In SD all three are used to solve problems, explore events, develop sensitivity to other peoples’ feelings. Many specific techniques enliven and broaden the enactments including: *role reversal, the aside, doubling, soliloquy, mirroring, the empty chair, future projection, freeze frame, sculpting, and walk and talk*. These help participants to shift perspective, develop empathy in action, and express a wide range of thoughts and emotions, which would not be expressed in a standard role play.

The magic of PD, SD, and CD is the logical, mindful, truthful, purposeful, mutual behavior of all the characters. This is based in two facts: (1) that human behavior is dependent on relationships with others. Each role we perform in life is conditioned by all other roles and contexts, and (2) the power of the “*hic et nunc*,” the here and now present-ness of the behavior itself. In dramatic enactments a past or future event is always brought to the present and lived out before us in the here and now. In action methods the co-action of each participant and the here and now present-ness make the enactment real and truthful; they make the “as if” a powerful “if”.

Summary

SD is a group action method that deals with roles we share with others. CD deals with roles that are shared among one culture or ethnic group but not another, or with roles that are conceived of and expressed differently by the different culture groups that are interacting. Although we are more alike than different, CD focuses on the differences amid the similarities. Both SD and CD are concerned with those aspects of roles we share with others. Both help people/groups to clarify values, solve problems, make decisions, gain understandings, learn roles, practice new roles, and become more spontaneous. SD helps to concretize common roles and practice using them. CD helps culturally different groups to concretize, to see and understand the culturally based differences within common roles, to come to see the value in each, to choose more appropriate behavior in these shared contexts, and then to practice and learn the new behaviors required of a created “third culture”.

Uses of SD and CD: TEAM BUILDING and the use of Sociometry

Some teams work really well together. Their individual and collective creativity is at its peak, they get along well and respect each other; they always meet their deadlines and their work is highly profitable. What differentiates this group from the one that fails? The answer is in its *Sociometry*.

Most teams are formed without any thought of how well they will work together. Someone retires and leaves a spot in a particular department. The next in line is often promoted from within and steps in to take over the job. But is he the right person to fit the job in that particular group?

Do we ask questions such as:

Does he have a similar work style and ethic as those in his department?

Does he have a similar way of communicating?

Does this department know him and trust him?
Is he good manager material?

Moreno was fascinated by our ability to choose. He saw that there are both visible and invisible networks of choice, e.g., churchgoers are the visible network; those who sit together or work together are the invisible network. Sociometry describes and measures the dynamics of choice in social groups as they exist; but it can also be used prescriptively to reorganize social networks according to peoples' invisible preferences for future modification. The dynamics are based on the concept of "tele" which is the "current of feeling that flows between two persons" (Hale 1981). Derived from the Greek meaning "far" or "distant", it is "the socio-gravitational factor which operates between individuals drawing them to form more positive or negative pair-relations..." (Moreno 1985-86). Thus it affects not only attraction but repulsion. It relates to intuition, insight into, feeling for, and appreciation of another person or group (Hale 1981). It is the unspoken connectedness between and among people and even animals.

Sociometry allows us to look at the underlying connections in a group, as well as the covert, often unspoken disconnects that can inhibit harmonious relations or productivity in a church community, a school, or workplace. Through sociometry, these conflicts can be weeded out, unspoken connections can be identified and nurtured, work teams can be realigned and the organization can function at a higher level, allowing for more productivity and increased morale. The more satisfied people are in their environs or at work, the more work they do and the better the product. The more harmoniously the staff interacts the more that gets done, the more successful the business. In church congregations, the more blessed the communion of saints.

Questions for Church leaders:

- How do we assign the members of a team or committee?
- Does it involve assessments of how well they work together—their personal tele?
- How much dis-function in Church organs is due to lack of concern for tele?

CRISIS INTERVENTION

Often when there has been a crisis within an organization, employees are expected to carry on as though nothing has happened. This could manifest as a death, a scandal, a downsizing, a move, termination of a top-level employee (either through quitting or firing), loss of a major account, or any a number of other scenarios. In parishes the closing of a school.

Studies in work environments have demonstrated that if the staff's anxiety and loss have not been attended to, productivity and morale fall sharply, and the use of sick days and personal days rises. Therefore, it is in a company's (and the Church's) best interests to encourage employees (priests and congregations) to process these events and get to the other side of the crisis.

Through the action methods of sociometry and sociodrama, the staff can be assisted in doing just that, so that together, they can work through this big loss or shift, this crisis, and be assured that both they and the organization can survive it.

Questions for Church leaders:

- How do we handle communal/individual grief, mourning, non-acceptance that arises through crisis (such as death, illness, trauma, abuse, sudden change of assignments)?
- How do we deal with the shock, the fall in morale, the apathy, the withdrawal due to crisis?
- What methods are we using?

SKILLS TRAINING THROUGH ACTION

Usually, when an employee joins an organization, or is promoted to a new position, s/he is given a job description and a list of expectations but little or no coaching or guidance for how to do his/her job. This can result in an employee excelling as s/he steps into this new and challenging role and/or it can result in revealing his/her growing edges—those areas where the employee requires professional development.

Studies have determined that when it comes to job satisfaction, harmony in the work environment and your relationship with your boss matters even more than the size of your paycheck. According to researchers at Florida State University in Tallahassee, workers with unsupportive supervisors are twice as likely to feel sad and helpless.

We are constantly growing, learning new roles, upgrading and retooling. But how does an employee or supervisor learn a new role and address those growing edges, without jeopardizing the health of the company? In skills training seminars, employees are guided through a process of practicing specific work-related skills to allow them to master what it takes to do their job. Whether it is a manager learning how to coach an employee, or a customer service representative learning how to speak with an irate customer, skills training through action will allow the employee the opportunity to try out a number of different responses in a safe learning environment. Because s/he has worked out the “kinks” in a “professional laboratory”, when the situation arises on the job, the employee will be well prepared to handle the challenge, feel empowered and confident, and do a better job.

Questions for Church leaders:

- How do these findings relate to the ways we choose our superiors and train them?
- How do they relate to the way we make appointments? Set up committees? Organize work teams and train them in their new skills?
- How do they relate to the training for new roles as priests, pastors, managers, lay leaders, RCIA educators etc.?
- Duties and roles of priests are, or should be, constantly adapting to the needs of the community. But how does the priest learn on the job? An updating course or seminar is one thing but how does he master what it takes? Where is the lab for ministry?
- How do we help sisters, deacons, priests and church workers, whose paycheck is negligible, to be and feel supported in their work?

STRATEGIC PLANNING

When a company or an organization is planning its future, it is often done by sitting around a conference room table and tossing out ideas. That setting certainly doesn't inspire creative thinking—but action does. If a company is preparing a five year plan, why not have staff members experience a future projection—what it will be like in five years. Let them bring it to

the table now where they can step into the organization five years hence and speak from that place? With well thought out interviewing, this process will allow for increased spontaneity and creativity, which will elicit ideas that are “outside the box”. It will increase excitement for the future of the organization, increase morale and create a lively sense of teamwork.

Questions for Church leaders:

- How do we organize our diocesan/parish/school/ planning sessions?
- How do we implement their directives?
- How do we envision future outcomes?

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

In work environments, one often finds unresolved conflict that is not only unprocessed, it is rarely, if ever, expressed. Moreover, most managers are not trained in how to resolve these types of conflicts, or worse, may be embroiled in such a conflict with another staff member. The proverbial “elephant in the middle of the room” impedes employees’ ability to concentrate on their work and affects productivity.

Conflicts between different culture groups or ethnicities are even less accessible and much more difficult to address because of the greatly increased potential for misinterpretation and misreading cultural cues. Here an intercultural application of SD or CD can be used. It has produced astounding results in situations of intense ethnic conflict in Africa and can easily tame the most intractable scuffles in the workplace.

Anxiety and spontaneity are inversely related. The more anxious a person is, the less spontaneous he or she can be. Therefore, when there is conflict within an organization, or poor communication, or a crisis of some kind, everyone’s spontaneity and creativity suffers. As a result, morale plummets, people are afraid to take creative risks, the staff feels disconnected from each other, and they don’t feel bonded towards a common goal. It doesn’t matter at what level the anxiety exists—among the directors, the managers, between managers and employees or between employee and employee, or employee and the public. That anxiety or conflict affects the “mood” in the organization, and that negativity is contagious. Through the process of a classical encounter, employees can be helped to state their concerns in a mutually-respectful way, and work through them productively. Each staff member will benefit from such a process, because they have all been feeling the negative effects of the tension. This process can also be an opportunity to educate the staff on effective communication, such as being assertive vs. aggressive, thus allowing for a greater environment of mutual respect.

Questions for Church leaders:

- What arrangements do we have for opening discussion around unresolved conflicts in our parish communities, or at the deanery, region or archdiocesan levels?
- How do we deal with intercultural, racial, and ethnic conflicts in community?
- What venues for communication are available in the community? Are they effective? Do they reduce anxiety—the enemy of spontaneity?
- What means are available for educating toward greater intercultural sensitivity and acceptance, toward interculturality and integration?

Future Focus

Using action methods, I plan to facilitate intercultural/interreligious dialogue, role and skills enhancement at the parish and diocesan levels, among the people in the pews and the clergy, in religious communities and at administrative and leadership levels in the Church. I also plan to do couples workshops with couples in culturally mixed marriages and workshops for intergenerational groups where children have become "Americanized" and parents have not. I plan to introduce the magic of sociodrama first through "safe" bibliodrama. Bible stories provide excellent warmup material that can lead groups into SD or CD enactments. I am already having group sessions at a prison (LAMDC) and I would like to extend SD and CD workshops to gangs and other organizations. Doing SD and CD with such groups will help them understand one another better, interact more effectively, be able to deal with role-transitions and effectively learn the new life skills.