



On Making a Marriage, an Inst., or a Society

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IIASA Working Paper

1973



Holling, C.S. (1973) On Making a Marriage, an Inst., or a Society. IIASA Working Paper. WP-73-010 Copyright © 1973 by the author(s). <http://pure.iiasa.ac.at/36/>

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November 1973

WP-73-10

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On Making a Marriage, an Institute, or a Society

1. Leadership

The ingredients of leadership require a mix of the philosophical and practical not easily found. We are used to labelling these as strategies and tactics, but that division is scarcely fine enough. At the least, there are two kinds of tactics -- those required to initiate a modified vision of the future within present realities and hostilities, and those required to consolidate this vision in order to make this future the present. The strategy and the two kinds of tactics represent three different styles or talents which have not generally been comfortably accommodated in one person.

A flair for strategy is not measured by winning or losing. That is the yardstick for tactical success. Nor is it measured by the gradual disappearance of problems as solutions are evolved. Every solution, good or bad, will generate new problems, just as every increase in understanding reveals new unknowns. A strategy, then, is a success of the solutions devised lead to new problems which are more tractable and more simply resolved.

China now seems to be one country which has carefully crafted a strategy. One facet of this strategy is self-sufficiency, but it is not expressed directly in terms of the nation. That would be mildly interesting, but the key wrinkle is that this goal is proposed for social units on small spatial areas. So it is a goal of self-sufficiency for the village (the production brigade) or for the communes which are collections of contiguous villages. From this specific addition to the goal flow the most profound social consequences.

There is a tea commune near Hang Chow which occupies the most productive tea growing land in China. It is a scarce crop of high quality which generates a very high yield and return. Despite this, when new land was brought into agricultural use, the land was not planted to tea but to lower yield, lower cash return crops like rice, wheat and market vegetables. In a national sense, it is the height of inefficiency not to concentrate on tea. But it makes great sense if the goal is for that commune to be self-sufficient in food. It makes great sense for a country which has historically been so shaken by famine and war.

Not far from Shanghai there is another agricultural commune with over 20,000 people occupying 688 ha. Now,

and in the past, this commune has had diversified agriculture, and the expression of self-sufficiency has taken a different form. It can now no longer be described as a simple agricultural community, but as an integration of agriculture with light industry. The light industry has been triggered by various specific needs of that commune. And so, one sees small factories innovating, developing, and manufacturing harvesting machines designed for the particular needs of that agriculture. Household equipment is manufactured, as well as the objects more traditionally thought of as handicrafts. There is even a factory producing light-bulbs, partly for commune use and partly for export. Again, from Western eyes, a factory producing light-bulbs on this small scale seems folly. There are no economies of scale and it is bewildering to imagine the replication of these small factories throughout major parts of China. But again, the goal is not economic advancement, but self-sufficiency of a small unit. And to implement that goal, there must be great diversification of activities, and hence of experience, within the community concerned.

The consequence of that strategy of self-sufficiency, at that scale, is diversification within the community, close recycling of material, internal experimentation and innovation, and independence. For the society as a whole

the cost of failure of any one of these communes will have very little consequence, even though the probability of such failure might be high. In the West, our strategy would lead us to decrease the probability of failure even if when a failure occurred, the cost were immense. Remember the blackout in the Northeastern United States?

But in a social sense, the strategy is of even greater consequence. For when the inevitable problems of the community emerge, they are detected by the same people who have the experience and the power to resolve these problems. Because of the emphasis on small spatial scale, there is not a spatial separation between the source of the problem and the source of the solution. And for that reason, there is intense, personal motivation.

A counter-example is found in the history of other developing countries. Edgar Snow speaks of the introduction of English land ownership laws into Burma prior to the Second World War. Traditionally, land was under the effective control of a village, but with the new temptation of temporary wealth, over fifty percent of the best rice paddies ultimately fell into the hands of absentee land owners. This was less of a strategy than a happening, but it led to an inflexible system which could not respond to the emergencies of drought, or, generally, to the needs for change. And it could not respond because the peasants

(read: institute staff or wife) who lived the problem were not the landlords (read: administration or husband) who could resolve them. The option of the village itself resolving by joint sharing and experimentation was foreclosed.

True strategic failure occurs when solutions lie in other, isolated hands. That is the route which leads to systems analysis as the panacea of the world's ills -- glue for the unglued.

The successful strategy then makes possible the easy exploration of alternate tactics. One important set are the tactics of initiating a fresh concept and direction within a system which by definition resists change. And these tactics must dance between the extremes of dictatorial fiat and subtle deviousness, both of which are seeds for disaster.

The tactics of initiation can make or break the consolidation and day-by-day operations. Allende conceived and initiated a grand strategy for Chile which was successfully established through an even more unique tactic of initiation within existing institutional and legal frameworks. But it led to tragic disaster because of unrealistic preconditions for consolidation.

An effective tactic of initiation must of course honor the concept and strategy. But the genius comes when it is structured to reduce not the number of future problems, but the cost of those problems in human terms -- in short, a resilient structure.

Nor is this division into strategy and tactics a division between idealistic and pragmatic as our present breed of politicians would contend. That particular dualism leads to the barren denunciation of idealists as woolly-headed (remember Lester Pearson?) and pragmatists as evil (remember Truman?). Both strategy and tactics must be equally infused with the ideal and with the practical.

But grand strategy and sensitive tactics of initiation become subverted without the quite different tactics of consolidation. And it is equally necessary for these tactics to have both a philosophy and a technique of day-by-day operation which, in this case, prevents the ideal from being smothered by detail. Or from being attenuated by time. It requires a sense of the need, not for stability, but for flexibility within persistence.

The bureaucrat's dream of stability might make his life sane, but it turns an energizing ideal into a boring ideology. It becomes a wisp that can be seen but not

grasped. The tactics of consolidation are tactics of designed instability which capture and lead that natural rhythm of enthusiasm, exhaustion, boredom, and renewed enthusiasm experienced by all individuals, institutions and societies.

But where are these talents? We certainly see a reasonable number of individuals with exciting, humane and well articulated strategies -- but they lack the sense of the tactics to initiate and operate. We probably do not find as many individuals with superb talents for initiation - - but when we do, they often do not know what they are initiating. The commonest talents are those of consolidation -- but in their drive for stability the individuals having these talents destroy the substance.

Perhaps no one person can ever blend all three talents. Perhaps the best our poor world can expect is the happy appearance of individuals with a blend of two of the three. But if that is the case, any grand enterprise must have two leaders -- one a strategist-technician and one a tactician-strategist. Every Mao needs a Chou En-Lai in marriages, institutes, and societies.

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November 1973