

THE STAGES OF LVT

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Notes on presentation for Best Practice, April 2nd, 2008

This session will involve:

- The Method of LVT in terms of five stages
- An application involving a particular type of heterogeneous group
- Your participation in a technique for making clusters

The five stages of LVT are known as:

1. Focus
2. Gather
3. Organise
4. Integrate
5. Realise

We first of all treat them as a sequence of different types of process, each with its own distinctive procedures.

FOCUS

This is strongly related to the practice of 'pure' dialogue: free-floating conversation *out of which* a direction emerges. In the given situation of the heterogeneous group, there was no collective task nor did they belong to the same organisation, although they shared in some broad values.

It is supposed that any gathering of people provides a location for various implicit concerns, which form what is technically called in Group Analysis a 'matrix'. As conversation ensues, various threads emerge and blend. Representative questions stemming from this emergence are articulated and written on flip charts. The sequence of questions expresses an implicit narrative in which the members of the group can share. A 'final emergent' question is agreed (it might well have been an *aim* or a *topic*, say).

This final agreed question or statement then serves as the *focus* for the work that follows.

GATHER

The abbreviation 'MM' is used for 'molecule of meaning'. MMs can belong to various scales (broad perspective to detailed feature). Ideally, they should all be of the same 'size' and 'weight'; though this is a matter of perception. They should be clear statements. We can attend to their 'grammatical correctness' but what matters more is that they are *autonomous* or significant in their own right.

If there are many people and they have to be divided into different sub-groups it is likely that the total output of MMs will contain duplicates or very similar items.

These should be removed because they add to the bulk of material without adding significance. Duplication, etc. is removed by 'distillation' – replacing sets of duplicates with just one. This enhances the subsequent processes. As an associated issue, we can consider the use of *inputs* to the generation of MMs. These can be introduced after the people have made their own MMs, to amplify their range of thinking, or right at the beginning. The former has some practical wisdom. Inputs can include texts or stories. There is also in progress an exploration of dreams as input, which involves a marriage of LVT with the Social Dreaming Matrix of Gordon Lawrence.

ORGANISE

The 'primary task' of Organise is to *increase meaning*. Adopting this view entails that clusters are formed not simply according to similarity but according to a more complex requirement.

A physical metaphor is that of a set of particles experiencing both attraction and repulsion with other particles (one can allow for 'neutrality' as well): if the particles are free to move they will they will form a variety of compounds. Think of MMs as energetic and communicating with each other and you will see them capable of 'forming themselves' or 'self-organising' into meaningful clusters.

There is then the question of giving each cluster a 'title'. The title given should not just be a summary of the content of the MMs the cluster contains, or a label, but signify the *emergence* of a new level of meaning.

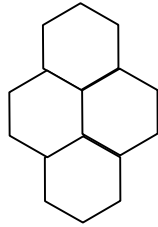
The simple basic instruction to a group is that the titles they make should not duplicate or even echo the MMs but speak in a different voice from them.

Arriving at a new level of meaning can be aided by making the *steps* of aggregating MMs into a cluster *explicit and conscious*. Considering clusters with up to five MMs, this suggests a distinct role for the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and so on. In the more familiar way of making clusters, no attention is paid to which MM is first (or last). Here are some general indications of the sequence:

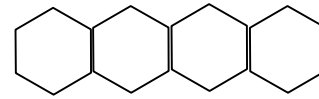
1. Select an MM that is *interesting*
2. Add a 2nd MM that *enhances* the meaning of the 1st
3. Add a 3rd MM that makes the previous two more specific or *directed*
4. Consider adding a 4th which *completes* the previous three
5. Consider adding a 5th that *highlights* the *new emergent meaning of the cluster*.

Having more than 5 MMs tends to blur meaning rather than enhance it, because 5 (as in the well known '7 plus or minus 2' principle of Miller) is about the largest collection we can embrace 'all at once'. The sequence can be variously described but must correspond to the guiding rule of *increasing meaning*.

Clusters made in such a way then contain far more information than usual because the way they are made can be recorded. It can also be at least partially represented in the way the MMs are placed. For example:



Says something different from

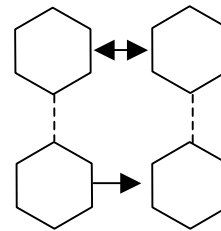


Clusters made systematically contain 'arguments'. The proximity of the MMs imply relations such as 'if – then', 'yes – but also', 'in relation to', 'in contrast with' and so on.

[As an aside, the process described here is akin to the operation of *cellular automata* or, perhaps, to Conway's 'Life Game']

Bifurcation at Organise

A 'bifurcation' is where a process can go in one of two possible ways. At the stage Organise, the process can continue as a *reduction of quantity* (in effect, this means reduction in number of MMs) as in 'chunking' MMs together to make first generation clusters or sets of new MMs, and then chunking these new MMs to make second generation clusters and so on. Eventually, one will arrive at a handful of MMs, which can *then* be considered as a 'system' (the details of the diagram are just to suggest connections or structure).



In this path, any *internal structure* of the clusters is lost. But this enables structure to come out at the end.

Along the other possible path, we keep the clusters as signifying arguments and move on to *Integration*.

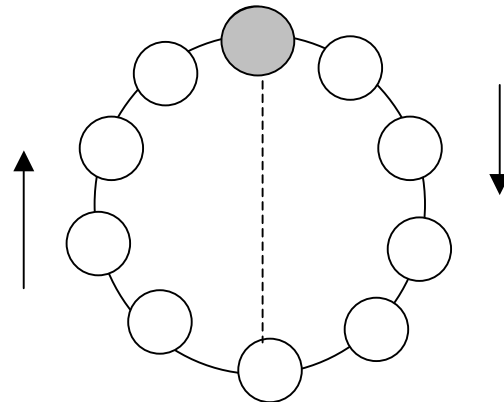
INTEGRATE

As a rough guide, we want somewhere between 7 and 17 new MMs (cluster titles or arguments) to work with, the optimum being around 12. Our standard method of integration is based on placing the new MMs in a circle or ring.

The primary task in the stage Integrate is to construct a view of all the elements that shows how they can best *work together*. This introduces the role of *Ideality* in a strong way. Beyond the separate vectors of increasing meaning that applied in the previous stage, we now have the prospect of just one. How, in other words, can the separate directions, etc. signified in the new MMs (the meaning of the clusters) be made coherent?

[The concept of Ideality is best expressed in the Russian system of innovation called TRIZ. Briefly, it is measured as Benefit/Harm.]

The Ring has a starting point (shown in grey) and a circulation (shown by arrows). The idea of the Ring derives from *narrative* and the property of a 'complete' story as marked by a union of beginning and end (the hero sets out on his quest and fulfils it).



A significant aspect of a Ring Composition is the mirroring of elements left and right: they will be about the same things but looked at in different (though complementary) ways.

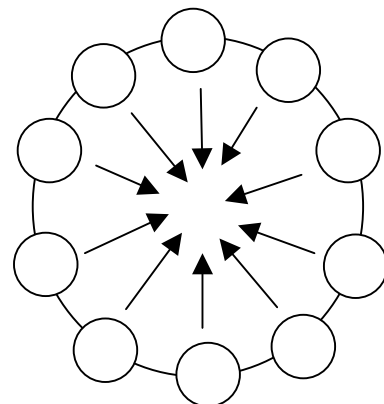
The practice of making a ring is similar to that of building a cluster in steps. One person is invited to begin the story and then others take it up. The sequence can be reviewed and changed.

The form of the Ring allows many kinds of treatment, including that used in system diagrams, or even dividing the circle into quadrants. But the main force of the structure of composition is in driving towards a sequence that enables there to be a *whole action* with maximum coherence. The bottom term is technically called the 'turn' because it is there that the sequence has to turn round and reflect itself in such a way that the total process ends up realising the aim of the starting point. One general example of how this might appear is the right hand side as 'ideas' in contrast with the left hand side as 'realities'.

The circle means the items are connected, while the cross connections represent how they are balanced.

REALISE

Picture what TRIZ calls the IFR – Ideal Final Result – at the centre of the Ring. Then, we can make moves towards it from the outer ring by proposing intermediary steps. This is to make all the MMs arranged around the circle now *converge* towards a unitary core meaning.

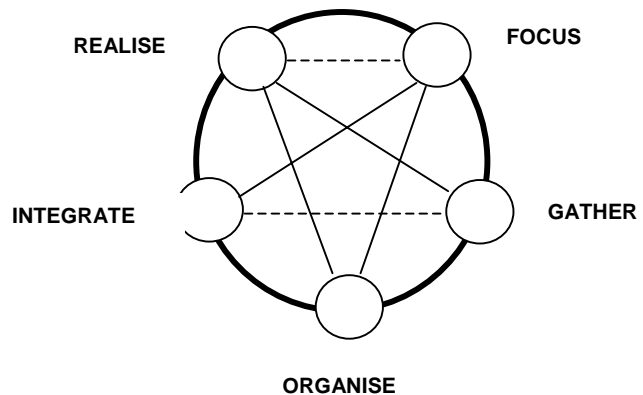


An example is shown below. In this case, the eight inner yellow hexagons were related to the eight members of the group. The actual centre place is not filled and remains in question. In this particular example, the arrangement of the Ring happened to allow for the eight-fold inner circle and in such a way that there were two main empty places. It may well be that the Realisation is of some irreducible contradiction.



STAGES IN A CYCLE

Drawing on the method of the stage Integrate we can portray the five parts of the LVT method in a cycle. This also suggests different sequences for the process and 'short cuts'. For example, one could go directly from Focus to Realise, or via Organise, as well as through the other stages. One could go directly from Gather to Integrate.



Organise appears as the 'turn'. In the practice of the method, many people do not venture into the second half of the cycle. The second half remains so to say as a 'shadow'. Imagine the figure folded in half so that only the first three stages are visible.

CLOSURE

It is important that whatever has been realised is reflected back to the aim of the Focus. In Ring Composition, this is called the 'latch'. Some honest evaluation of achievement of purpose is needed to close the process.

COMPOSITION OF THE METHOD

The elements of the LVT method can be identified in greater or lesser detail. On one scale, even the bare act of 'writing on a hexagon' can be significant; when it follows that there might be hundreds of elementary operations involved. On the big scale, there are only five: the stages.

Correspondences across different scales are significant. For example, the steps we suggested for making a cluster correspond to the five stages of the method as a whole. Each stage probably has five components. For example, in Integrate:

1. Select a starting point
2. Continue the 'story'
3. Select a 'turn'
4. Complete the story
5. Verify the 'latch'.

Making such correspondences may seem like merely abstract possibilities, but they can pay off in refining technique and helping other people in performing the work. They are not dictatorial or binding.

SUMMARY

Each of the five stages has its own mode of thinking and we can develop a variety of ways to enable them.

- Focus involves 'true' dialogue allowing for the emergence of purpose
- Gather involves the generation of MMs exhibiting autonomy
- Organise involves the generation of 'clusters' or groupings of MMs, which can be done in significant steps representing an argument
- Integrate involves making an holistic view centred on Ideality
- Realise condenses meanings into an Ideal Final Result
- Closure of the process involves making a 'latch' between Focus and Realise
- The five-fold structure of LVT method can be replicated at every scale; it is fractal.
- There is a variety of ways of sequencing the process, not only in the order Focus-Gather-Organise-Integrate-Realise
- There are short-cut versions such as Gather-Integrate, etc.
- Much current practice in effect stops at Organise, so that the later stages are only implied.
- Our practice and understanding of LVT can be nourished by exploring new ways of conducting each stage