

DIALOGUE AND LVT

SYSTEMATICS	DIALOGUE	SOCIAL DREAMING	INTEGRATION
TRIZ	LVT	CONSTELLATIONS	INNOVATION
GOLDRATT	DEMOCS	CYNEFIN	ANALYSIS
TECHNICAL SYSTEMS	CONVERSATIONAL SYSTEMS	NATURAL SYSTEMS	

Dialogue and the Median Group of Patrick de Mare

Dialogue is the most open-ended of the methods under consideration. There is no leader, no set process, no theme or agenda and no one source of MMs (molecules of meaning – term used in LVT). There is no writing, only conversation. The power of dialogue stems from its *suspension* of habitual modes of conversation and hence of some aspects of mental inertia (see TRIZ). This is intended to release deeper powers of communication and enhance the making of meaning. However, the process almost necessarily involves some experience of turbulence, and Patrick de Mare, a pioneer in the field, has argued that without the generation of what he calls 'hate' (stemming from frustration) new thinking is not possible.

Though there is no leader for the group, there is a *convener*. This role carries a responsibility for *containment*: the holding together in consciousness of contrasting and divergent elements, which is intrinsic to group psychoanalytic procedure. Though intervention is minimal – the least the better – the convener can make moves to check on whether people are being excluded either because of 'group think' or some imagined rule or constraint operating in the individual. Patrick de Mare favours a group size of around 17 people. On the one hand this takes the group outside the frame of a hierarchical or 'family' group, which is dominantly concerned with relationships within the group and tends towards emotional content. On the other it is smaller than a large group, which tends towards some kind of collective behaviour, such as splitting into 'parties'. The in-between size of group de Mare calls the *Median* group.

It is striking that the size of the Median group – approximately 20 – corresponds to the number of MMs that were used in *structural communication*, which was the original form of LVT. It was found that using about 20 items for the operating language interface between the author (tutor-at-a-distance) and the students was optimal. 'Answers' to questions were made by the student selecting a sub-set of the 20 or so MMs. The (small) set of questions was composed in such a way that every MM was relevant to at least one question. A question is like a theme that can thread itself between members of a Median group. In the group situation, the convener has to respond intuitively to ensure that all members are involved at some point and he or she cannot possibly 'work out' what to do. Such a group runs for about 1 ½ hours, sufficient time for everyone to say something. It is curious that although the two methods – Median group and structural communication – are as different as can be imagined they seem to share in a similar property of requiring a certain numerical level of diversity.

The Median group is of the largest size compatible with equality between its members. This makes it highly significant. In common with many methods, the Median group requires participants to suspend their immediate reactions and allows for a more reflective mode of conversation than is usually the case 'in life'. It has to steer its way through the temptations to polarize and split the group into two camps, or reduce the conversation to an antagonism between two participants. If now the utterances are taken as the MMs, then the discipline of suspension allows the people to become aware of more than one or two of these MMs as a *whole*. This in itself is an enhancement of *mind* or 'minding'. Though it is not made explicit or formalised in the Median group, it corresponds with 'clustering' in LVT.

Comparing the two methods: while LVT is based on written material and making selections of MMs explicit and visible, and the Median group uses no writing and the combination of MMs (whether as utterances or people) remains implicit in the mind of the group, the two exhibit essentially the same form. A group of people can only produce MMs one at a time while any *new thinking* derives from awareness of several MMs *taken as a whole*. In both methods, the value of a group is that it makes possible a diversity of MMs, which is more difficult for a single individual. Any single individual will produce MMs that correspond with his or her point of view. In a group, the diversity of contributions can produce creative tension because it will not be a first obvious how they can 'agree' on a different level.

Outsight

De Mare has proposed that the Median group can develop 'outsight' – a complement to the more usual concept of 'insight'. That is to say, the group can become aware of culture, which is usually unconscious. It does this by making a 'microculture' for itself that is capable of mirroring the larger culture in which it exists. The main step towards oversight is by moving from the dyad to the triad. This step is dialogue. Dialogue is not merely conversation between two or more people; it is a passing beyond dualities. However, unless there is first an awareness of duality, dialogue is not possible. In *The Millennium and the Median Group*, De Mare writes:
<http://www.duversity.org/articles/The%20Millennium%20and%20the%20Median%20Group.doc>

The mind is a process which reflects the structure, more than a mirror of course, and actively reflects in the thinking sense. This dimension is what I have increasingly learned to recognise as the true spirit of existence (which has the

same derivation as the word ecstasy) and which I am sure Descartes experienced when he declared he knew that he existed, in that most celebrated philosophical dictum 'cogito ergo sum'.

For Kant the problem of the duality between noumena and phenomena, between is and ought, was how to find a way of mediating these two worlds. Descartes saw body and mind as split between two "substances" and therefore incompatible. Heidegger considered that philosophy should establish inner independence from the natural sciences; he surely is the therapist's philosopher. The self-evident solution to this dualistic quandary is the practice of the supreme art of dialogue (Plato), a third dimension. Today dialogue is a major feature in therapy. On the whole the dialectic of Hegel (thesis, antithesis and synthesis) is treated as a method or doctrine rather than as an authentic philosophy. Lacan introduced the order of duality for the real and imaginary orders, whilst the symbolic world he characterised as triadic.

In his writings, de Mare presents five stages, which represent a *systematics* of mind. Systematics is the study or degrees of organisation using the symbology of the integral numbers, a discipline that relates to Jung's idea of the numbers as *archetypes*.

1. The first stage is whatever is going on. This is mindless. It is the given that goes by itself.
2. In the second stage, there is duality. An important aspect of this is that there is then both what goes on and also an *awareness* of it. This introduces a split and tension and possibility of choice. People begin 'to mind'.
3. Then comes the triad and dialogue. This has been discussed by John Schlapobersky in terms of the *number of people involved* in his paper *THE LANGUAGE OF THE GROUP: Monologue, Dialogue And Discourse In Group Analysis*. He says:

I shall differentiate between three primary forms of speech that arise in the matrix of any group. At the most basic level *monologue* - speaking alone (with or without an audience) - is a form of individual self-expression. At the next level *dialogue* - a conversation between two people - is the form of communication that distinguishes a bipersonal exchange. And at the third level *discourse* - the speech pattern of three or more people - allows the free interaction of all its participants in a flexible and complex exchange that distinguishes the communication of a group (Moffet 1968). These patterns of speech are universal cultural forms arising in all communication and are present in the life of every group, although in no set order. Monologue can be understood as a soliloquy; dialogue as the resolution of opposites or the search for intimacy; and discourse as the work of a chorus.

The idea of treating conversation in various categories according to the number of people involved has been independently developed and extended by Anthony Blake in his scheme of *N-logue* (<http://www.duversity.org/ideas/n-logue.html>). This approach sits side by side with De Mare's general treatment of dialogue as triadic (as is often the case, different authors differ in their use of terms such as 'dialogue'). In de Mare's case, he associates the triad with the possibility of generating new thinking, though this might simply be called *thinking* in contrast with repeating thoughts held in memory.

4. The arising of a microculture constitutes a fourth step. It is a stabilisation of dialogue as implied in the idea of a culture. De Mare has never presented a fourfold model of this stage but it must involve the organising influence of a pattern. In LVT, this would correspond to the stage of Integration.
5. The final step for de Mare is called *totalisation*. This is ideal wholeness in which the group is enfolded into a *koinonia* or 'impersonal fellowship' that becomes translucent to any culture. If considered in relation to the very different concerns and language of *TRIZ*, it corresponds to *Ideality*.

Teresa Howard gives this description of how oversight arises in the Median group: As the individual does not exist as an entity without a group, each person is seen as a nodal point in this web of communication and both individual and group are seen as having mutual influence on each other. The 'matrix' carries with it all the unconscious assumptions brought into the group by the individual members, assumptions which are usually described as transference from past important family relationships. In the median group, the matrix is seen as additionally including the transposition of large areas of experience from outside, in the world beyond the immediate family and it is through these associations that aspects of culture and society are included within the 'group mind' (de Mare 1991: 81). (<http://www.cyc-net.org/quote2/quote-741.html>)

A Median group needs to meet on a regular basis over an extended period of time. This is rarely possible, so the practice and experience of this kind of group remains limited to a few.

Dialogue and LVT

In LVT there are usually *stages* in which one kind of thinking work is done at a time. The three types of thinking work are:

1. Gather – to recall, articulate, derive, etc. a set of MMs *relevant to some purpose*. The important thinking task here is to deconstruct habitual descriptions and explanations of a problem area or concern so that the way that information – and more importantly *experience* – has been *bound together* in the past is loosened. This is the precondition for making new connections, inferences and insights. The result is a set of MMs displayed at random with *gaps* between them.
2. Organise – to group or associate MMs together in such a way that they point to the ways people are trying to *make sense* of their information/experience. Organise can extend to the involvement of *values*. At this stage, what has been *implicit* in the collection of MMs begins to be made explicit. Attention is being paid to the gaps or 'emptiness' in the visual display of Gather. MMs are *not* grouped by drawing in linking lines but by being placed together. The result is a display that suggests 'families' within a community. There are still gaps between the groupings.

3. Integrate – to structure the groupings made in Organise into a system. Such a system enables people to explore the mutual relevance of the groupings. There are schemas which list various principles of mutual relevance such as *systematics*, *TRIZ* and *living systems theory* amongst many others. In standard LVT, the principles are not codified but allowed to emerge from the general feeling for wholeness and harmony.

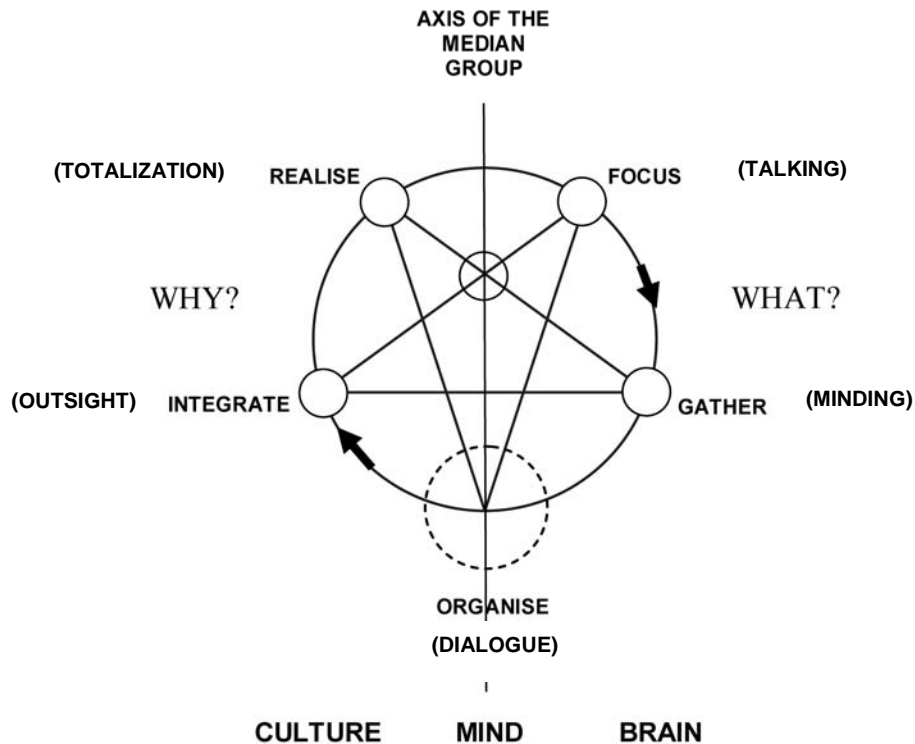
In dialogue, these three stages are in operation simultaneously, although there is an overall drift through them over the period of a session. A reflection of the LVT process into dialogue is:

1. Diversity – the expression of diverse meanings taken in an all-embracing fashion without any constraint of topic or purpose. Implicit in this approach is that a group will have an *inherent* purpose and topic it is not currently aware of but which can emerge.
2. Conjunction – the holding together of two or more MMs to allow for the emergence of new meanings. This follows the 'equation of meaning' (Anthony Blake): Meaning (1) + Meaning (2) = Meaning (3).
3. Microculture – the weaving together of various conjunctions to allow for the emergence of *outsight*.

To consider the two additional 'bracketing' stages of LVT – Focus and Realise – it is necessary to add that in dialogue Focus is first of all, existentially, an agreement to meet together *in dialogue* and not for any other reason. This involves the group obeying the constraints of sitting and talking for a set time, usually in a circle. More essentially, it corresponds to the 'mutual tuning' of participants to each other such that they are empowered to speak and also to allow others to speak. Such 'mutual tuning' is to be realised in what corresponds to Realise in LVT. In the case of dialogue, Patrick de Mare says that the outcome should be *koinonia* or impersonal fellowship. If the stages of LVT are compressed to Focus and Realisation and the intervening stages ignored, then the dialogue group simply agrees to meet and realises *koinonia*.

The compression of LVT to Focus-Realisation puts the mechanics of the process into the background. *LVT implicitly relies on dialogue*. In this context, dialogue is *qualitative* while LVT is *quantitative*. In practice, both involve an aspect of the other. *It would then seem desirable for experience of the one to enhance the practice of the other*. Such an idea is explored extensively in *The Supreme Art of Dialogue* by Anthony Blake, in which he writes about the intimate correlation between LVT and the Median group process. [In the passage below the diagram has been modified to bring out the correlation between de Mare's stages and those of LVT].

We can say that positioning the median group – which is Patrick de Mare's optimal size for dialogue – at the stage Organise is significant. On the one side are the fragments arising during the course of meeting, while on the other is the possibility of an integrated structure, similar to de Mare's proposal of generating a micro-culture. The realm centred in Organise may be equated with 'mind' in his sense. It is shown with a dotted circle to suggest it can contract or expand, even to encompass the whole circle. Interestingly, de Mare proposed in theory five stages and his 'totalisation' corresponds to 'realise'.



He writes in the article 'The Millenium and the Median Group' (2002):

“Totalization is as important as reductive analysis, but faces the opposite direction. The centre of the self (a point so small as to be non-existent) in the middle of its contextual circumference (time and space) gropes towards the timeless and spaceless centre of the universe. In the most ancient of Hindu Vedic writings, it is written that in the beginning there was a state of perfection which became humanized and personalized by humans as God. Therapy therefore does not only ‘shrink’ into smaller and smaller circles but also expands and focuses on the vast context of the social and universal, unravelling and disentangling in a bid for liberation.”

The two sides of the whole are labelled WHAT? and WHY? to correspond with the two aspects of language, the former to do with description or talking *about* and the latter to do with injunctions and values or talking *from*. The in-between realm is that of WHO? and is concerned with talking *with* that de Mare connects with being on a level and koinonia.

The almost central point, where lines cross, represents what Malcolm Pines has called ‘moments of meeting’, which would correspond with our N-logue. Such moments constitute the *ipseity* or essence of dialogue. Its ‘lower nature’ or contingent actuality is made of the (unconnected) fragments that ‘gather’ during the dialogue. Its ‘higher nature’ would be the ‘outsight’, the ‘integrated’ view into culture, that de Mare claims is possible. Dialogue rests on the agreement to undertake ‘talking on a level’, which agreement we can equate with Focus. Finally, it is as a contribution to the humanization of society that it should Realise itself.