

# Effective organizing



You may have had only one or two clergy leaders, or you may have had many. Like all organizations, you have fallen into certain patterns of operation, some good and some not.

Again like all organizations, you have two choices: to continue to do what you always have done (because that's the way you do things) or to reorganize (and thereby re-energize) the way you do business.

If you want it reorganize, the tools used for over fifty years by the organizations under the umbrella of the Industrial Areas Foundation can help. Years ago, we were conducting a training session for a group of leaders in one of our most effective and successful citizen's organizations. The training focused on one of the most basic skills of any kind of organizing: how to organizing: how to organize and conduct a productive meeting in one hour or less.

Running good meetings has long been the practice within our organizations, but IR became a hallmark of our organizations because we kept caching and re-reaching people how to did it until it finally became second nature to them. In the course of the session, one of the leaders asked why the same people who conducted and participated in interesting, useful, and productive meetings in the context of citizens' organizations that often lasted three or more hours, were not well-planned, and often led to little action or progress.

We began to get request from rabbis, imams, pastors and lay leadership groups in congregations to teach them how to use the same tools that worked in citizens' organizations within the context of their congregations. So we started to develop training programs that were directly aimed at

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congregational development. We started with how to run more effective meetings and broadened our work from there.

Today, we spend a significant amount of our time - in congregations of all faiths and denominations and in several seminaries -? describing what we believe are the four universal tools of all effective organizing and how the understanding of those tools and use of those tools can contribute to the daily life of congregations. We will describe each of these tools and suggest how they can be used by leaders of local mosques, synagogues, congregations, parishes and other local religious institutions.

Then we will give five short examples from our work about how these methods worked in specific congregations from different faiths.

The four tools are: . Individual Meetings: Which are by far the most important, effective, and least used organizational tool in congregational life today. II. Power (relational) Analysis: Both of the institution and the broader community in which congregations find themselves.

III. Teaching and Training: Which is used sometimes and somewhat in some congregations, but too rarely and ineffectively.

IV. Action and Evaluation: Which is also used in congregations, for example in liturgy training but again too narrowly and without a commitment to the development of congregational leaders. I. Individual Meetings An individual meeting is a face to face, one to one meeting, in someone's home or apartment or workplace or local coffee shop that takes about 30 minutes.

The purpose of the meeting is not chitchat, whining, selling gossip, sports talk, data collection, or therapy.

The aim of the meeting is to initiate a public relationship with another person, this may seem so basic and old assigned that many of you are wondering what we are talking about here. We are suggesting an approach to others that Dietrich Bondholder, the great Lutheran theologian, described in this way: " The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them...

Those who cannot listen long and patiently longer even notice it... The death of the spiritual life starts here..

. Brotherly pastoral care is distinguished from preaching... By the obligation of listening. If the death of the spiritual life starts in " talking past others" so frequently that oh " finally will no longer even notice it," then the birth of the spiritual life starts in the individual, one - on - one meeting -? in listening to the other person.

Face - to - face meetings are the truly radical acts of effective organizing. They are not a slogan or a demonstration; not an email blitz or point presentation. The commitment to listening to others means that the leaders who initiate them operate on the basis of several important assumptions. The first assumptions is that the other person is worth listening to.

The late Bernard Crick described this as having a belief in the affirmative individual - hat most people, most of the time, will do the right thing, if given the opportunity.

So the very act of calling someone up and setting up an individual meeting with them, of going to their home or meeting them at a coffee shop and listening to them, of asking them what they think about the community or congregation or country, understanding how they see the future, hearing what hopes and dreams they have, learning where they've come from and how they see themselves five years in the future, is an act of recognition.

You are saying to the other person: You have values, ideas, dreams, plans, lessons, insights that are well worth listening to. Recognition: is the precondition for any ongoing reciprocal working relationship with others. When my late father arrived in the United States, a teenager from the coast of Croatia, the local parish priest in the Croatian parish in Chicago went to his apartment and did an individual meeting with him. Then, every year, for 60 years, until my father died that priest and his successors paid a yearly visit to our home to sit with my father for a while and then bless our house. This was a banner day in my father's year.

The priests were recognizing him, listening to him, and bringing the incense and holy water from the church to him. Those priests demonstrated that they believed that my father -? bartender, plasterer, security guard, working man -? was worth visiting and hearing out. In Christian language, this is how my father learned that others believed he was made in the image and likeness of God. The second assumption is that the person initiating the individual meeting - organizer, pastor, veteran leader - understand that the time devoted to individual meetings is more important than time spent in more conventional activities.

All rear living”, said theologian Marin Auber “ is meeting”.

The initiator knows that the new dynamic created by meeting and relating to another person is rich with opportunity and possibility. The congregation isn't mostly in the building or staff or programs already in place. The congregation isn't in the head of the leader or in the mannerisms of the hierarchy. The congregation lives and grows in the interaction between existing and new leaders and members - in the very act of doing the individual meeting.

When a young assistant rabbi arrived in his new congregation, he started his ministry by doing nearly 100 individual meetings.

He also sat in on many other meetings and activities. But the action that told him the most about the congregation- and told the congregation the most about him - was the fact that he had spent 100 evenings in their homes and apartments, meeting face to face and one to one. He knew his congregants, and they knew him, much better after three months than many congregations know their new staff after several years. His sermons were spoken to people's specific struggles and concerns, not to some generic congregation in some generic place.

It's not that he used anyone's name in his talks.

He didn't need to. People heard IM talking directly to them, based on what he had absorbed in his initial round of individual meetings. He wasn't talking past others. He was talking to them and with them.

The third assumption, hinted at in the act of doing individual meetings but only proven over time, is that individual meetings but only proven over time, is that the corporate identity of the congregation remains in formation; that the newest member, the most recent arrival, is invited to join in the ongoing creation of the evolving local community.

The relationship is not one-way, unilateral, provider - to- consumer, but two - way, reciprocal, and mutual. This assumption is easier to convey when the congregation is relatively new, when it is in the first 30 or more years of its existence. The explosion of new evangelical churches in the past three decades is in part a product of the burst of energy that sometimes occurs when an institution is born and begins to grow at a rapid rate.

More than 1, 200 such churches, some as large as small American cities, have formed and developed during this period.

The challenge to them now will be to maintain the sense of experimentation and outreach that characterized their early years. The tendency to mature - that is, to become more bureaucratic and programmatic, to become formed, fixed, and no longer in need of large numbers of new members - will tempt these congregations as it has more mainline religious bodies over the centuries. Several years ago, leaders working in a soup kitchen in a Long Island parish incorporated into their mission the habit of doing individual meetings with their client.

Instead of simply handing a sandwich to the men who came to the kitchen, they sat down with them and asked them who they were, where they were

from, what line of work they had been in, and why they were there. They listened, long and patiently.

Day after day, and they heard a story, repeated by many men, that they had never heard before. Many of these men lived in small group homes called 'sober houses.' They were supposed to be places where people in recovery from substance abuse could reside, so that they could receive daily outpatient services from area treatment centers.

In reality, many of these sober houses were poorly run, riddled with drugs, and exploited by the companies that managed them. One was run by a company that had preyed on other vulnerable population in other states and had been exposed in those states, but had simply moved to Long Island and exploited a new group. Another sober house was run by an operator with mob connections.

The food in many of these places was terrible; hence the trip to the church's soup kitchen. There were middle class men, mostly white, who had been professionals and skilled workers before becoming addicted to alcohol or drugs.

In the process of organizing the volunteers in this soup kitchen, one paid community organizer, and other interested volunteer leaders in the parish did more than 600 individual meetings. A team of leaders, most in recovery themselves, formed. In - depth research led to an effort to expose that bad sober house operators and clean up conditions in them. This successful social justice effort started in the act of listening, person to person, in a parish basement, by volunteers who valued the opportunity to develop new



public relationships as much as the chance to deliver a healthy meal to hungry and isolated men.

These three assumptions are what ideologues, advocates, and program directors have long forgotten, if they ever considered them. The ideologue, left or right, knows all the answers and wants the rest of the world to fall in line, to swallow whole the 'correct' analysis or platform or doctrine, and to parrot back the party line. The advocate know all the answers too, and wants to speak for others, not listen to others, not wait for others to develop the ability and skill to voice their own concerns.

And the program director wants to deliver the service or food or clothing or housing voucher without getting to know the person who is seeking help, without asking what other aspects Of that person's life are working or have worked, without challenging that person to do as much for himself or herself as humanly possible.

**POWER (RELATIONAL) ANALYSIS** Many leaders of congregations operate without a clear and honest picture of the relational terrain in which they function- both inside the congregation and with the surrounding community.

A basic understanding of which leaders have followings and influence, how they relate to one another, who determines what decisions are made and how money is spent is what we call a power or relational analysis. At bottom, a power analysis is a relational map of the way an institution really functions and how that institution actually interacts with other institutions in the real world. Not to have this map - objective, visible, changing as relationships change - is an invitation to get lost and stay lost.

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For example, in some mosques, the Imam is both the spiritual and operational leader. There may be a board, and the Imam may relate to it in various ways, but he's clearly in charge. If you want to work well with this particular mosque, however, while the Imam may be the spiritual leader, the lay president of the board may be the operational leader, and three or four key members of the board may be the key supporters of the president is critical to any effort to operate within the issue, even though showing respect for the spiritual role of the Imam would still be important.

In black church settings, some congregations are what we call “pastors’ churches”, some are “deacons churches,” while still others are steered by several lay families with deep followings in the community. If you don't know which is which, whether you are a member of a particular congregation or an outsider trying to work with it, you are doomed to failure. Very similar analyses of all churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and other religious institutions can and must be made if you are going to try to work with them – either internally or externally.

Instead of doing such power analysis, however, many would-be agents of changes operate on the basis of their own preconceptions of how institutions should function. Or they engage in wishful thinking. Or they accept the stereotypes or abstractions peddled by others, including the leaders of the very congregations they are trying to organize. In our parlance, these people remain in the world as they think it should be, rather than taking the time and investing the energy to decipher how a congregation operates at this reticular time, in this particular place, in the world as it is right now.

In New York City, residents had long been told that the way to get things done was to take concerns to local community boards. There were about 100 of these, and they were dominated by local city council people and borough presidents and funded by the city. We did an analysis of the city's political structure and budget process, and it quickly became clear that the mayor controlled about 96% of the city budget, leaving only about 4% in the hands of the city council and their hand-picked community boards.

That meant each community board had, at best, some influence over 1/10th of 4% of the budget - about \$20 million each out of a total budget of \$50 billion, a relative pittance. So we refused to focus on the community boards or city council people.

In fact, the seven local leaders of community boards who were members of our local congregations publicly resigned. They announced that they would now be doing public business in a different way.

And that way was to relate directly with the mayor, who appointed the commissioners who managed billion-dollar agencies, and who controlled approximately \$48 of the 50 billion spent each year by the city. This analysis and subsequent action, of course, agitated the community-board types, the foundation officers who had urged countless community groups to follow this dead-end approach, and very local elected officials.

The less power these individuals actually had, the more desperate they were to convince us that they were important.

They positioned themselves as gatekeepers to the power brokers. They pretended to be frantically busy. They sent junior aides out to meet with local community groups because they were “ tied up a City Hall.

” (Years later, in a coal community school board office, we found their desks packed with important papers- menus from local restaurants and little else. ) Our analysis also put a new form of pressure on our local congregations and congregational-based organization. The challenge was clear: how to get into a productive, public, working relationship with the mayor and his key appointees.

This is not a simple or easy matter in a city of eight million people with scores of powerful interests- real states, finance, union, development, advertising, legal and others. But at least that challenge, if met, leads to real action, real response, and real results. How does such a power or relational analysis get done by a congregation? The first answer is: very carefully.

There are egos to be assuaged, ancient grievances and hurts to be understood and either buried or ignored, and tons of spin to be UN-spun. The first rule is that the analysis is done with and by the leaders of the congregation themselves.

It is not an outside critique as much as an inside admission of the way things operate, both inside the congregation and visas a visas the “ outside” world. Second, a power analysis of a congregation can only be done after a serious ND sustained series of individual meetings.

Until trust is developed between among members of the congregation, no one is going to open up about how the congregation really operates. In fact, everyone will claim that it functions exactly the way it says it functions in the congregational by-laws or literature. This is almost never the case, but it is a myth that many congregations try to peddle to outsiders and even to their own members. ) so, a power analysis of a congregation is based on trust relationship that have been developed over a period of time through a systematic series of one-on-one interviews. If you are working in the Chicago area, it's important to know that the relationship between the mayor and local aldermen is different from the one in New York and other cities.

In Chicago, the mayor has enormous power.

But the Daley Dynasty (Pater et fish) has an unwritten agreement with the city's aldermen: the mayor gets to control all downtown and other major development (like O'Hare Airport, the convention center, Navy Pier, sport arenas, etc. ) while the aldermen get veto power over all local development in their wards (at least those that the mayor doesn't care about). The aldermen, in effect, are mini-mayors have used their wards. In New York, four successive mayors in their power to rebuild neighborhoods with local not-for-profit groups, even when these changes were opposed by local politicians.

In Chicago, however, the unwritten agreement between mayor and aldermen prohibits that. The mini-mayors control all contract and pay-offs in their wards, and as a result they have let their communities crumble while lining their own pockets. Frequently, they have ended up indicted, convicted, and

in jail. The mayor then appoints another alderman, and the cycle starts all over again.

We do not recommend that the people of Chicago accept this arrangement, but we do suggest that it's critical that they understand it. Only then can they contend with, confront, or alter IR.

Third, a power analysis of a congregation is not written in ink, not plastered on a wall for permanent viewing, not put into a power point presentation for the world to see. It is sketched in pencil, revisited regularly, and edited on an ongoing basis. There are good reasons for this. A power analysis is very fluid thing, changing month to month, week to week, even day to day at times.

To try to freeze it in time is not only impossible but also counterproductive, cause a frozen power analysis is almost worse than no power analysis at all. Relationships change, both inside the congregation and with the outer world.

The key is to keep observing, refining, and adding to an ongoing understanding of how the congregation really works. A power analysis of a congregation is primarily a tool for the leaders of the congregation and for others whose judgment and advice is sought and respected by those leaders. It is a tool for "disorganized and reorganizing" the congregation by its own leaders and friends and colleagues -? nothing more, nothing less. TEACHING AND TRAINING Almost every religious institution takes seriously the task of teaching its members about doctrines and traditions.

But very few congregations take the time to instruct its members about how to master the basic tools of leadership in the institution itself. In the Roman

Catholic setting, for example, there is the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RICA), which prepares someone seeking to join the church with an understanding of basic tenets and beliefs. But there is no Rite of Leadership Initiation of Adults (ARIAL). What skills does a potential adult leader need to learn to operate as effectively as possible in a congregation?

In almost every congregation, we organizers hear people express concern about the lack of growth or the persistent loss of members, but in those congregations no one is being taught how to initiate and create meaningful public relationships with existing and potential congregational members. In many congregations, we hear worries about too few leaders doing too much work, but in the vast majority of those congregations, no one is taught how to mentor, support, and challenge new leaders.

There is no clear recruitment or training process for new leaders. And little or no money is gutted for this teaching and training.