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[1]

THE TRANSACTIVE STYLE OF PLANNING

John Friedmann

Bridging the Communications Gap

Transactive planning changes knowledge into action through an unbroken sequence of interpersonal relations. As a particular style of planning, it can be applied to both allocation and innovation. This chapter states the principal conditions for transactive planning and explores its major implications.

Transactive planning is a response to the widening gulf in communication between technical planners and their clients. To simplify the discussion, let us assume that planners as well as clients are individual persons rather than institutions, and that clients generate streams of action on which they wish to be advised.[1]

This assumption is not altogether unrealistic. Institutions do not relate to each other as wholes, but through a complex series of exchanges among individuals. Although these individuals behave primarily according to their formal role prescriptions, each role masks a singular personality. Roles are defined by a set of abstract behavior patterns, but the person assuming a particular role may be straightforward or devious, disposed to be tranquil or angry, approachable or

remote, eager for power or reluctant to assume responsibility. The planner steeped in the practice of the transactive style will try to reach out to the person who stands behind the formal role.

The difficulties planners and clients experience in communicating valid meanings to each other have already been discussed (Chapter 4). The barriers to effective communication between those who have access primarily to processed knowledge and those whose knowledge rests chiefly on personal experience are rising. We have seen that this problem is not unique to America; it is found to some extent in all societies that seek the help of technical experts. Messages may be exchanged, but the relevant meanings are not effectively communicated. As a result, the linkage of knowledge with action is often weak or nonexistent. This is true even where planning forms part of the client system itself; even there, actions tend to proceed largely on the basis of acquired routines and the personal knowledge of the decision makers. Planners talk primarily to other planners, and their counsel falls on unresponsive ears. As we shall see, however, the establishment of a more satisfactory form of communication is not simply a matter of translating the abstract and highly symbolic language of the planner into the simpler and more experience-related vocabulary of the client. The real solution involves a restructuring of the basic relationship between planner and client.

Each has a different method of knowing: the planner works chiefly with processed knowledge abstracted from the world and manipulated according to certain postulates of theory and scientific method; his client works primarily from the personal knowledge he draws directly from experience. Although personal knowledge is much richer in content and in its ability to differentiate among the minutiae of daily life, it is less systematized and orderly than processed knowledge. It is also less capable of being generalized and, therefore, is applicable only to situations where the environ-

ment has not been subject to substantial change. The "rule of thumb" by which practical people orient their actions is useful only so long as the context of action remains the same. Processed knowledge, on the other hand, implies a theory about some aspect of the world. Limited in scope, it offers a general explanation for the behavior of a small number of variables operating under a specified set of constraints.

The difficulties of relating these two methods of knowing to each other reside not only in their different foci of attention and degrees of practical relevance (processed knowledge suppresses the operational detail that may be of critical importance to clients), but also in language. The planner's language is conceptual and mathematical, consciously drained of the lifeblood of human intercourse in its striving for scientific objectivity. It is intended to present the results of his research in ways that will enable others, chiefly other planners, to verify each statement in terms of its logic, consistency with empirical observation, and theoretical coherence. Most planners prefer communicating their ideas in documents complete with charts, tables, graphs, and maps, as well as long appendices containing complex mathematical derivations and statistical analyses. The concepts, models, and theories to which these documents refer are often unfamiliar to the clients to whom they are supposedly addressed.

The language of clients lacks the formal restrictions that hedge in planning documents. It, too, employs a jargon to speed communications, but the jargon will be experience- rather than concept-related. Client language is less precise than the language of planners, and it may encompass congeries of facts and events that, even though they form a meaningful whole in terms of practice, are unrelated at the level of theory. Planners may therefore seize upon a favorite term from their client's specialized vocabulary and subject it to such rigorous analysis that what originally might have been a meaningful expression to the client is given

back to him as a series of different but theoretically related concepts that reflect a processed reality.

Housing administrators, for example, have long been accustomed to derive quantitative program targets from what they call the housing deficit, which is calculated on the basis of new household formations, a physical index of housing quality, and an estimated rate of housing obsolescence. Planners have recently replaced this concept with what they believe to be a theoretically more valid model for establishing the housing needs of a population. They postulate an *effective housing demand* that arises in the context of particular submarkets organized according to major income levels and locality. Each submarket has unique characteristics with respect to the type of housing offered, the credit available, and the degree to which it is able to satisfy the social—as distinct from the economic—demand of each population group. Aggregate housing demand, therefore, is seen to evolve not only in accord with the differential growth rates of the affected population groups but also in relation to changes in the growth and distribution of personal income and in the structural characteristics of each submarket.

I do not know how housing administrators will react to this conceptually more satisfying model for calculating housing requirements, but I suspect that they will not be overly pleased. They may even accuse the planner of purposefully misconstruing the "real" (i.e., experiential) meaning contained in the traditional and administratively more convenient term of housing deficit.

The language of clients—so difficult to incorporate into the formalized vocabulary of the planner—is tied to specific operational contexts. Its meanings shift with changes in the context, and its manner of expression is frequently as important as the actual words employed. This is probably the reason why planners prefer written to verbal communications, and why the latter tend to be in the form of highly stylized

presentations. Tone of voice, emphasis, subtle changes in grammatical structure and word sequence, so important in the face-to-face communications of action-oriented persons, are consistently de-emphasized by planners. Whereas planners' formal communications could be translated by a computer into a foreign language without substantial loss of meaning, a tape-recorded conversation among clients could not.

Planners relate primarily to other members of their profession and to the university departments responsible for the transmission and advancement of professional knowledge. Clients, on the other hand, relate chiefly to organizations of their own kind. The reference group of each acts as a cultural matrix that helps to confirm and strengthen differences of approach and behavior.

Reference groups are powerful institutions for molding behavior. This is especially true for the planner, whose situation tends to be less secure than that of his clients. His professional association not only keeps him continuously informed through newsletters, specialized journals, and conferences, but also confers on him the dignity and status of formal membership in a profession. The association reassures him when his competence is being challenged by outsiders and provides support when it is needed. In order to receive these benefits, the planner must conform to the norms of professional conduct. There are countless planning documents whose content is not primarily addressed to clients but to other planning professionals. For a planner's reputation is made more by impressing his fellow practitioners than by successfully serving his clients.

The reference systems of clients work in similar ways to enhance (or destroy) individual reputations. To the extent that clients also become professionalized—a trend that is very strong in American society—differences between planners and clients diminish, but the impediments to effective communication remain.

The mutual dependence of planner and client, coupled with a relative inability to exchange meaningful messages, leads to ambiguous and stereotyped attitudes that do little to resolve the basic problem. Speaking among themselves, planners say: "Ours is clearly a superior form of knowledge that enables us to gain incisive insights into conditions of structured complexity. As members of a professional elite, we are able to achieve a greater rationality than our clients. Effective problem-solving lies in the widespread use of processed knowledge." But they also admire the practical successes of their clients and secretly deplore their own inability to score in the same game.

The clients, on the other hand, in the sheltering environment of their own groups, counter the planners' claims: "Experience clearly counts most. Ours is a superior kind of knowledge, tested under fire. Planners are impractical dreamers who know more and more about less and less. Nothing of what they know can be applied. Problems get solved because we are in charge." But they also admire the planners' knowledge of things that are not visible to the unaided eye and so transcend the possibilities of knowledge grounded in experience.

What can be done to overcome these barriers to effective communication between planners and clients? The traditional means, an exchange of formal documents, has not proved spectacularly successful in the past. Strangely enough, most planners are probably still unaware of this.

A few years ago, I served as an advisor to the government of Chile on questions of urban and regional development. Several foreign experts working with me were connected with a number of central institutions, such as the National Planning Office and the Ministry of Housing. My own office, however, was independent and not formally associated with any agency of the government.

After a few months of initial reconnaissance, I thought that I had obtained a sufficient grasp of the situation to make a series of far-reaching recommendations. I set

forth these recommendations very carefully in a lengthy memorandum, which, translated into Spanish, was carried by messenger to a number of leading government figures. A covering letter explained the general purpose of my effort. After letting two weeks go by, I arranged for an interview with each person who had received a copy. During the interviews, formal courtesies were exchanged, and some noncommittal references were made to the memorandum on which I had labored for several months. Afterwards I returned to my office to wait for a formal reply, but none ever came.

What had gone wrong? A good part of the answer can be found in my failure to establish, long before I ever set to work on the memorandum, a transactive relationship with the people whose encouragement I wanted. There was, indeed, no compelling reason why the government of Chile should have adopted any part of my recommendations. Who was I, after all, except an expert with a vague professional reputation abroad? Was it not presumptuous, not to say arrogant, for me, a foreigner who had spent only a few months in Chile, to suggest a whole series of sweeping reforms to responsible people who had been working for a good part of their political lives on problems of which I myself had only recently become aware?[2]

All these questions converge upon a single answer. If the communication gap between planner and client is to be closed, a continuing series of personal and primarily verbal transactions between them is needed, through which processed knowledge is fused with personal knowledge and both are fused with action.

Transactive Planning as the Life of Dialogue

In transactive planning, two levels of communication have to be distinguished. The first is the level of person-centered communication. It presumes a relationship that is applica-

ble to all forms of human intercourse. This I shall call the life of dialogue. The second is the level of subject-matter-related communication, which is sustained by the primary relation of dialogue and cannot be understood independently of it. Both levels are indispensable to planning. Where they become dissociated, thought is reduced to theorems and action to pure energy.

The life of dialogue always occurs as a relationship between two persons, a You and an I. Its characteristic features may be briefly stated:

1. *Dialogue presumes a relationship that is grounded in the authenticity of the person and accepts his "otherness" as a basis for meaningful communication.* In the life of dialogue, each person seeks to address the other directly. To be authentic means to discover yourself through dialogue with many others. And therefore we can say: The life of dialogue engenders a process of mutual self-discovery. At each stage in the process, you attempt to integrate discoveries about yourself into the already existing structure of your personality, thereby changing and expanding it. To do this well, you must have found an inner security based on a consciousness of what you have become and are yet capable of becoming; a basic confidence in your ability to integrate new learning; and, finally, a willingness to open yourself to others.

Opening yourself to another implies an acceptance of the other in his radical difference from yourself. The life of dialogue is not possible between two persons who hide behind their many masks and are therefore incapable of growing and extending their knowledge about themselves. It requires an openness that confirms the other in all the differences of his being. It is precisely this that makes changes in self possible. Through dialogue, you accept the freedom of the other to choose himself.

2. *Dialogue presumes a relation in which thinking, moral*

judgment, feeling, and empathy are fused in authentic acts of being. The authentic person is an indivisible whole. Nevertheless, four states of his being can be distinguished. The permanent dissociation of these may lead to a warping and even to the destruction of the person. Intellect alone is barren; moral judgment alone is self-righteous; feeling alone is destructive; and empathy alone is unresponsive. These four states of being must be held in mutual tension so that each may regulate the others. The point of intersection among them may be called the center of the fully integrated person, whose thought is tempered by moral judgment, whose judgment is tempered by feeling, and whose feeling is tempered by empathy.

Where these four states are brought into conjunction, speech becomes simply an extension of being, and the meanings of speech are backed up by the person as a whole: they can be taken on good faith. This does not always make them right, however. The learning person in the life of dialogue can make mistakes, he may be torn by inner doubts and conflicts, and he may be incapable of expressing himself integrally, leaving his meanings ambiguous and only partially articulated. Nevertheless, the standards of his speech are based not upon the extremes of truth, morality, feeling, and empathy taken each alone, but on the values that result from the conjunction of these states.

3. *Dialogue presumes a relation in which conflict is accepted.* The acceptance of the other in the plenitude of his being as a person different from yourself implies that the relationship cannot always be harmonious. Conflict arises out of your different ways of looking at the world, your different feelings about the world, and your different ways of judging the world. It may also arise from a failure to make your meanings clear within the context of the other's perceptions and feelings. But conflict can be over-

come by a mutual desire to continue in the life of dialogue. This is the basis for resolving conflict at the level of interpersonal relations.

4. *Dialogue presumes a relationship of total communication in which gestures and other modes of expression are as vital to meaning as the substance of what is being said.* Everything you say and everything you do—or fail to do—carries a message to the perceptive other. Dialogue is a web of meanings from which not a single strand can be separated. Where gesture and speech convey contradictory meanings, the authenticity of dialogue is put in doubt. Such contradictory behavior is, by itself, no proof of lack of authenticity, but it gives rise to a suspicion of bad faith.

5. *Dialogue presumes a relation of shared interests and commitments.* The life of dialogue cannot be sustained unless there is a sense of partaking in the interests of the other. Mutual participation in a matter of common concern is not a precondition of authentic dialogue; it may evolve through dialogue. Where it fails to evolve, the dialogue is interrupted.

We sometimes use one another to advance different interests. To the extent that this occurs, dialogue becomes an instrument to subordinate the other to your will. Presenting yourself to the other according to the demands of the situation is an inescapable part of dialogue, but "using" the other for interests that are not shared destroys any possibility of sustaining it. The life of dialogue is a relation of equality between two persons. It must not be perverted into an instrumental relationship.

6. *Dialogue presumes a relationship of reciprocity and mutual obligation.* Though dialogue is possible only between two persons who are free to choose themselves, this freedom is by no means unlimited. Dialogue is a contractual relationship. In accepting the other in his radical difference, you also assume responsibility for the consequences of

this relationship. The act of "accepting" implies an act of "giving." The other "gives" or "entrusts" himself to you as a person, as you entrust yourself in turn. This exchange need not be balanced equally: no records are or can be kept. Nevertheless, a one-sided giving cannot continue for long. To the extent that you are willing to "accept" the other, your obligations to him will increase, and you must be willing to give at least a part of yourself in return.

7. *Dialogue presumes a relationship that unfolds in real time.* Dialogue takes place in the "here and now" even as it relates what has gone before to what is yet to come. It is therefore a time-binding relationship capable of infinite evolution. Nevertheless, it cannot escape the constraints of a given situation and must ultimately become relevant to the particular conditions of each participant's life. Storytelling is not dialogue; dreams are not dialogue. You cannot crawl out of time; dialogue is not a route of escape. Dialogue brings you back into time and into the conditions of your being here.

As described, the life of dialogue suggests an intimacy that most people associate with the relationship between husband and wife, parents and children, and close friends. In the circle of this extended family, non-utilitarian, person-centered relationships predominate. Outside its magic circle, relationships are expected to rest on a working, professional basis, to be centered on specific roles rather than persons—a form of behavior that carefully isolates intellectual and technical contributions from their matrix of moral judgments and feelings and presumes purely utilitarian transactions, in which no sharing need occur.

But this conception is basically wrong. The world of planning need not be qualitatively set apart from the world of non-utilitarian relationships. On the contrary, the impersonal, professional style of communication has been notoriously unsuccessful in joining knowledge to action.

It is true, of course, that one cannot maintain deep per-

sonal relationships with everyone one meets. But a person-centered relationship can be sustained at varying degrees of intensity and over periods of time that extend from only a few minutes to an entire life. Looking back at the requirements of dialogue, we see that the conditions are applicable to any relationship. We can be open and alert to the other, whoever he may be. We can accept him as a person different from ourselves without being threatening or feeling threatened in turn. We can try to hold our intellectual, moral, affective, and empathetic states of being in mutual tension. We can accept conflict as an inevitable part of dialogue and not its termination. We can look for the patterns of shared interests. And we can concentrate the life of dialogue on the here and now.

An attitude favorable to dialogue tends to call forth on the part of the other a desire to engage in it. Some persons are more difficult to reach than others, but in most cases, the response to an attempted dialogue is dialogue.

Transactive planning is carried on the ground swell of dialogue. When I prepared the memorandum for the Chilean Government, the basis for dialogue had not yet been established. Later, all this changed. In recruiting the advisory staff, emphasis was given to the personal qualities of each advisor—his ability to be a person (not a role-playing professional alone), to establish direct relations with others that would not be perceived as threatening, to be sensitive to the needs of others, and to learn quickly from complex, novel situations. Technical qualifications were also considered important, but they carried less weight.

At the start, the newly recruited advisor spent from six months to a year learning about the multi-faceted situation in which he had been placed and establishing relations of dialogue with a few key persons in the offices to which he was assigned. Although his formal role was not eliminated, it was so loosely structured that the advisor was able to emerge as a person. And once a relationship of this kind

had been established, transactive planning could begin in earnest.

The Process of Mutual Learning

Planners are forever coming up against new situations, but they confront them with knowledge that is little more than an aid to rapid and effective learning. Their theories, hypotheses, conceptual schemes, and analytical methods are useful only for converting the raw data of observation into general statements about reality. The validity of these statements is limited to a set of specified conditions. But the problems on which planners work—whether the design for a new town, a program for harnessing the waters of a river, or a policy for the development of scientific capabilities—must be studied in the fullness of historical circumstances. The number of variables that must be considered is substantially greater than those included in the analytical models of scientific work.

The planner's special skill, therefore, lies in his ability to be a rapid learner. His is an intelligence that is trained in the uses of processed knowledge for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge about reality. He comes equipped to bring order into a seemingly chaotic universe of data and sense impressions, to reduce this to a structure of relative simplicity, to isolate the processes responsible for the emergence and maintenance of the structure, to probe its propensities for change, and to locate the points of potentially effective intervention. Regardless of his specific procedure, the planner makes substantial use of analytical techniques in his work. The greater his virtuosity in this regard, the greater his pride in the results obtained. As I have said, his interests as a professional often get the better of his interest in serving his client. The following story serves to illustrate the point.

Some time ago, the U. S. Department of Transportation

cept the new perceptions and to make new images their own.

The Tao says: *Truly, a great cutter does not cut.* —Knowing the laws of transformation, the planner need not slash wildly into the tangle of social relationships, tearing out whole living tissues here and grafting others there, piling control upon control to make the process bend to his will. He will use the "natural" forces at work in society to produce the desired results. This means selective intervention and methods of indirect or field control. A knowledge of the consequences of strategic intervention is essential to the art of planning.

Similarly, the planner involved in mutual learning will not start by destroying the world view of his client. He will withhold his judgments, respecting his client's freedom and autonomy. To begin a restructuring of the client's field of cognition, the planner must discover within that field itself the points that provide an opening. What are the client's interests? What are the inconsistencies in his way of thinking and feeling? What are his secret doubts? What aspects of his knowledge are not supported by the values he affirms? It is through a process of selective focusing at such critical points that the planner can achieve the transformation and expansion of his client's learning.

The Tao says: *Tao invariably does nothing, yet there is nothing that is not done.* —Under conditions of mutual learning, the planner appears to be doing nothing: he learns, and, learning, he imparts new knowledge. As perceptions and images are changed, so is the behavior that flows from them. Time is necessary for changes in behavior to occur. In the natural course of things, little appears to happen, yet everything happens in due time. Persons change, institutions change, the environment for action changes. The ideas of the learner take root, are themselves transformed, and pass into action, affecting the behavior of society.

The Tao says: *The most yielding of things outruns the most unyielding.* —Mutual learning cannot be compelled; the planner cannot accelerate the processes of understanding and behavior change. Time is needed; listening is needed. If the planner listens carefully and long enough, his own thoughts may eventually be given back to him as the ideas of others. Only then can the planner truly be said to have succeeded in his task.

The future cannot be conquered by the present; compulsion destroys the generative forces in society. The planner must learn to yield when necessary, but also to persuade. Dialogue is essential to learning. Through dialogue, mutual learning occurs; and through mutual learning changes are brought about in the collective behavior of society.

The Tao says: *To give life, but not to own, to achieve but not to cherish, to lead but not to be master—that is the mystic virtue.* —This is the most important, and also the most difficult of the five teachings of the Tao. It says: let everyone be free to choose himself, do not desire what is not your own, do not hold back on what you know. As a teacher, fade into the background and let the student speak; as a student, take new learning and use it to advantage. But when there are neither teachers nor students, as in mutual learning, the property of learning is held in common trust: no one is master, each has something to give and something to receive. From period to period, you pass to higher levels of understanding. Do not cherish them. Keep your mind open to what is yet to come.

If the processed knowledge of planners is serviceable only insofar as it is used as an instrument for learning; if learning cannot be imparted to others except through dialogue; and if dialogue creates a process in which each partner has as much to give as to receive, then the Tao provides good counsel.

Transactive Planning in the Context of Society

American society needs a heightened capacity for learning about itself and, to make what it learns effective in guiding its own development, a way to transform learning into appropriate actions. This implies that we must find a way to join scientific and technical intelligence with personal knowledge at the critical points for social intervention. I have argued that transactive planning is the most appropriate method for achieving this linkage.

The transactive style is not, admittedly, applicable to every situation where expert knowledge is joined to action. It is inappropriate, for instance, *where expertise carries sufficient authority to act without the benefit of mutual learning.* The mechanic, the airplane pilot, or the surgeon is each prepared to do his job without elaborate discussion with his clients. There is no need for dialogue. Few questions will be asked and fewer answered. Nor are situations of mutual learning between expert and client common in highly stratified societies, where technical expertise enjoys high social esteem and clients unhesitatingly accept its judgments simply because they are offered under a prestigious professional label. In all other situations, however, the transactive style is essential to the ultimate success of planning. And this holds true with particular force in American society today.

Transactive planning is a style that humanizes the acquisition and uses of scientific and technical knowledge. But how can humanization in this sense occur at the level of society? Is it possible to extend the processes of mutual learning to society as a whole? Is societal learning possible?

Before answering these questions, we must define the nature of the problem with greater precision. What are the principal performance characteristics of the guidance system in American society today?

The most critical aspect is perhaps its increasing incapac-

ity to respond effectively to the demands that processes of change within society are generating. Throughout American society, there is an extraordinarily high degree of centralization in the power to make effective decisions; actions are initiated far from their ultimate points of impact. A system so structured experiences great difficulties in responding to the needs of the people. Because of the many levels through which information must be filtered, decisions tend to be made too slowly in the face of accelerating changes all about. Problems stand in line, waiting to be resolved, but nothing happens. Only those that seem urgent to those who occupy positions of power are advanced up the queue. As the line of unattended problems grows, dissatisfaction rises among the population. Because of its agonizing slowness, but also because its diagnoses are often incorrect, being made on the basis of highly aggregated but often incomplete and misleading information, the system frequently responds with the wrong answers. As a result, problems compound. Finally, some of the demands are simply filtered out and never receive a hearing, unless they are made in violent and screaming protest and so move up the scale of institutional priorities.

All these problems are aggravated by the fact that there is relatively little feedback of meaningful information to the centers of action. Feedback is generally slow, especially where actions have not yet been routinized. In addition, much that is relevant is eventually filtered out as information moves from its points of origin up through the hierarchy of action levels; subject to all manner of distortions on the way, it arrives at the top lacking the context that would permit a reasonable interpretation of its meaning.

The other aspect of a progressively unresponsive guidance system is a population that is progressively less and less the master of its destiny, whose lives are subject to random impersonal forces that no longer seem to be intended or controlled by anyone. Despite the official rhetoric to the

contrary, America is becoming a non-participant society. Its people have little understanding of their own environment. They are fed ready-made explanations by the media, but none of these seems to account for what is happening. Being so remote from control over events, the non-participant subject finally ceases even to care. He does not read the annual reports of the business in which he works but concentrates instead on the small world of his job. His view of politics is cynical. He skims the news about his city, hurrying on to the sports and entertainment pages, and he is mesmerized by evening prime-time television. From time to time, some spectacles, such as the landings on the moon, are arranged for his diversion.

The non-participant society is stirred up by its troubles, because they affect the lives of individuals within it: the war swallows its children, automation eliminates its jobs, the reeking air destroys its lungs, the poor make claims upon its pocketbooks. But no one really understands how all this comes about. The world seems alive with mysterious and evil forces. Conspiracy is suspected everywhere.

The system we have engendered is approaching the breaking point. The combination of growing unresponsiveness and non-participation is tearing the society apart. The guidance system is becoming increasingly reactive, moved by the unexpected turbulence of events, frantically putting out fires without ever seriously approaching the structural sources of a conflagration that seems to be gaining on what is left of the inherited order. These palliative measures are only partially effective, and their costs to the society are rising vertiginously. As a result, a small but growing segment of the population is beginning to withdraw its allegiance from the society.

The basic structural problem of the American guidance system is its rising level of ignorance. Reason has become unhinged from action, leading knowledge to take refuge in the cloistered irrelevancies of esoteric language, and actions

to lag farther and farther behind the events they seek so desperately to control. To re-establish the essential linkage, society needs a heightened learning capacity. This will never be achieved by creating some sort of super-brain that is plugged into a nationwide monitoring system of social indicators and whose repository of quantitative models spews out appropriate answers. The realization of this current dream, so dear to technocrats, would only widen the existing breach between knowledge and action with truly tragic consequences for the society.