

## **SGEME 6: Inspired by SGEME 5**

### **John Little**

I was moved by the contributions of Terry Quinn, Cecilia Moloney, William Zanardi, John Benton and Michael Shute in SGEME 5 and grateful to Philip and Robert for providing this opportunity to share notes on implementation. So inspired, I have thought it worthwhile to share some of my attempts to take Lonergan to my field of interest – that is, **to business**.

My Lonergan journey began in February 1992, at the moment I read in the third paragraph of the Preface to Lonergan's *Insight*, "the aim of this work is to convey an insight into insight". This was my luminous moment, prior to which Lonergan had meant very little to me. The fact that I was reading the Preface is a story in itself, to be told at another time. Since that time, I have been deepening my own understanding while, at the same time, taking 'Lonergan to market', as a self-employed management consultant. But this has proven more difficult than I anticipated, for others did not take up these ideas with the same relish and enthusiasm as I had done.

To be fair, however, I was well primed at the time to receive Lonergan, more so perhaps than most of my clients would have been. My own quest, through different jobs, special interests and activities has been, in retrospect, a golden thread that has lead me to Lonergan. Below, I would like to unravel a few strands of that thread.

### **Cybernetics and method**

Although I had heard of Lonergan in the Newman Society at the University of Melbourne where I was an undergraduate in the early 60's, I cannot recall much

about him, other than he was in good company, with Schilleebeckx, Rahner, Congar and Kung and others in the ferment of Post Vatican II. I was otherwise preoccupied, for I had started Medicine, and was in its third year when I decided to switch – yes, to electronic engineering - to follow an interest in cybernetics. After graduation, I worked for several years in Australian industry, generally in areas with a cybernetic flavour – control systems, telecommunications, acoustics and computer systems. I had also become interested in creativity and problem solving methods and found a research job in this area with the British Computer Company, ICL, in London.

Thus began a new phase in my work, concerning methods to assist small and large groups in problem solving, planning and organizational change. From ICL, I was offered work in Canada, with the consulting firm, Peat Marwick, in Montreal. Most of my work there was with large corporations, an exception being the Cree Indians of Quebec who had asked our firm to help them implement their historic James Bay Agreement. I was on a team for the next four years, helping their leadership acquire practical facilitation skills in planning methods.

Eventually, I decided to return to Australia with my wife and three children to take up a job I had been offered with the leading Australian management institute for post-experience executive education. I had come at a good time, for there was change in the air. I was able to introduce a radical new method at the commencement of their two-month residential executive programs – the Search Conference, developed by a fellow Australian, Fred Emery. Emery's design was essentially one in dialectic method, though being unfamiliar with Lonergan at the time, I could not have said so then. The typical executive program had sixty participants who would work in self-run syndicates of 12, to discuss, with a good brief and reading material at hand, twelve major topics relevant to management, such as marketing, finance, personnel, social change, government relations,

leadership, change management and so on. In these discussions, the executives would share their own experiences, would challenge and argue with each other, would meet experts in the field and then reach their own conclusions. One member of the group would write a 1500 – 3000 word report on their conclusions, and another would give an address to the whole session. Their learning was a process of deliberative enquiry, group support and peer pressure.

The Search Conference began within an hour of the group arriving in residence. The executives were thrown into the deep end, without warning, to spend the next three days in future gazing. Thirty of the sixty participants would explore a Desired Future – based on values that they thought important. The other half would explore a Most Probable Future, based on what they thought were the dominant driving factors in the environment. The two groups would then meet to share their scenarios, identify the similarities and differences, and determine what strategic and systemic issues that they and their organisations would face in the future, and hence what skills, attitudes and knowledge they would need to be successful leaders. Following the Search Conference, we would explain how the program would address the concerns, issues and personal needs that they had identified for their learning.

The point about these illustrations with the Cree Indians and with the executive education program is that I was being made deeply familiar with process and method. Although I could appreciate the Syndicate method, as it was then called, the Search Conference, and the creative and collaborative planning methods used by the Cree, I had no grounded theory **why** these methods worked. They were simply good tools. However, I was later to discover in Lonergan, a grounded explanatory framework that has sharpened my skills and increased my confidence and abilities in this area.

After six years in executive education, I set up my own consulting practice and found work with many Australian private, public and not-for-profit enterprises. Some years later, when I came across Lonergan, I was primed and ready, for my work had been essentially about insight, which Lonergan had now linked and integrated into the great intellectual heritage of our times.

### **Into Lonergan**

As a result of reading the Preface to *Insight*, I spent the year reading the whole text under the personal guidance of Tom Daly SJ, emeritus professor of Philosophy, and renowned Lonergan scholar. Every two weeks I would read a chapter and then meet Tom for an hour and a half to discuss it. We repeated this the following year with a number of colleagues and executives whom I had invited. Then, Tom and I decided to “package” Lonergan for business executives. We designed and ran a series of two-day workshop. We asked the executives to bring some difficult problems from their work, and, with exercises that we give them, they began to identify and name the levels and hence to commence the work of self-appropriation. We produced a 50 page workbook, with exercises, readings, graphics and images.

I began to use material from the workshop in my consulting engagements, in sessions of 15 minutes, or half an hour, or half a day, or an hour each day over two weeks as part of a leadership program. In one case, I had five straight days for a small group of high potential sales people with Ericsson. In another, I ran a Strategic Management semester within an MBA program, focussed on how strategic insight, judgement and decision of one person can bring about major change for an organization. Students selected some well-known individual to present a case of their own.

One engagement with the Federal Department of Finance was to take a small group of executives to uncover the meaning of the Learning Organization. I had insisted that the group discover what each was doing when they were learning before we could specify what the organization was doing. Naturally, we were trying to study Lonergan. For another federal department, I integrated creative thinking, based on Lonergan, into a ten-day leadership program for senior executives.

A lot of this work was fun, however, at least for the presenter. To build on the visual and imagery ramp to insight, and in contrast to Edward deBono's Six Hats model for creative thinking, I developed the **Five Rooms model for Mindful Thinking**. I would arrange five coloured cloths on the ground, and then proceed to cajole my audience to identify what operations and behaviour were characteristic of each. The Green room stood for Data, Red for inquiry, Gold for Insight, Purple for Judgment and Blue for Decision. Red was circular and placed at the centre, with each of the other rooms placed around it. I had a smaller replica of the Five Rooms which I could place within any part, to represent self-appropriation, and would use it to demonstrate how all levels operate integrally to direct and control any part. We called this the **Minder**. I had a loop also which I used to partially enclose the whole, to distinguish the private conscious acts from their public expression.

In all of my work with Lonergan I have had mixed results. Often, any enthusiasm I may generate dies away under the pressure of daily life. The lack of appropriate follow-up material means that much fruit may wither on the vine.

### **A Deepthing**

My most recent project was within a university, quite a contrast to consulting. In 1999, I was encouraged to approach an Accounting Professor, Jack Flanagan, at

the Australian Catholic University. Together we put a proposal to the Vice-Chancellor to set up a business ethics centre based on Lonergan. Eventually, it was approved in principle. Our idea was that we would get consulting income from seminars and research to keep us afloat. The university gave me an office but no money. I found a donor for start-up funds. We won some consultancies, but Jack left the university after two years and so I battled on alone for the next four years. We had a marketing issue – a Catholic label does not sell business ethics, we had an unknown product and it is difficult to find the right words to present Lonergan. We named our centre, CREDO. As well as being a Latin reminder of our Catholic roots, it had a neat Lonergan message, namely: Clear ideas, Reason, Enquiry and Experience, Decision, Outcomes... At the time, McShane suggested CREative DOing. CREDO also described what we did: Consult, Research, Educate, Develop and Organize. Too smart perhaps!

As a result of this work, however, a new phase opened up for me. Over the past three years, I completed a doctoral thesis on the foundations of organization and governance based on intentionality analysis. I argued that insight is the basis of all 'value-adding' in organizational processes, and inquiry is the driver of change. I proposed an eight stage value-adding Intentionality Analysis Model, IAM for the individual, and IAMO for the organization. I drew on Ken Melchin's work<sup>1</sup>, to argue an **entrusted** stakeholder good is the foundational and cybernetic goal of organization, and that this good is grounded more deeply for each stakeholder in the integral human good. This notion of trust brings out the relational nature of the human person, and by extension, the organization.

I have been invited to speak about my thesis at a JBCE conference (Colleagues in Jesuit Business Education) at Marquette University in July. [In the thesis](#), I took up

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Melchin, "Economics, Ethics and the Structure of Social Living," *Humanomics* 10 (1994).

a paper written by the late, well-regarded academic, Sumantra Ghoshal<sup>2</sup>, of the London Business School, who argued that business schools are in a mess. Enron was his starting point, and bad theories that they taught were his main contention. Ghoshal claimed that the inappropriate use of scientific method in social sciences has led to a neglect of intentionality in decision-making and thence to bad theories that ultimately affect business practice. He also discussed methods for data analysis and raised questions about epistemology. In short, he laid out the ground that Lonergan could easily occupy and embellish.

## **Conclusion**

There is virtually no reference to Lonergan in any of the major texts and writers of management. This presents an opportunity for us who are serious about Lonergan, especially when the topic relates to intentionality or thinking. For example, two academics at the Rotman School of business studies at the University of Toronto, following a major conference they had organized about the future of the MBA, published a book in 2008, ambitiously subtitled “Designing the Thinker of the Future”. They maintain that the essential and neglected skill required by leaders and managers of the future was integrative thinking - a meta skill – namely a skill to think about thinking. They wrote:

“Parts of the integrator’s problem have been articulated—not in any management textbook that we know of but in attempts by a few thinkers

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<sup>2</sup> Sumantra Ghoshal, "Bad Management Theories Are Destroying Good Management Practices," *Academy of Management Learning and Education* 4, no. 1 (2005): 75-91.

to come to grips with the link between words and objects, thinking and doing, perceiving and believing, and believing and knowing.”<sup>3</sup>

Neither of these authors had cited or seemingly had heard of Lonergan, nor of the rich resources available to them a stone’s throw away, at a sister institute at the same university! An opportunity?

Another example is evident in a statement made by Edgar Schein, an early leader in management thinking with his ideas on process consulting. At the twilight of his long and illustrious career, he writes:

I am left at this point (age 77) with more of a sense of realism about self, individuals, groups, organizations, societies, and health itself. The unfinished business is to figure out how teaching, consulting, therapy and other modes of influence draw on the same basic change model, but do so differently and with different goals and results. .... Deep down I think organization studies is still in a pre-Darwinian state of development. We do not yet know what the key categories of variables are around which to build our field, but the search for them is great fun.<sup>4</sup>

I wrote to Schein suggesting that Lonergan might help him find that common change model for which he was searching. I have had no reply. Nor have I had

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<sup>3</sup> Moldoveanu and Martin, *The Future of the MBA – Designing the Thinker of the Future*, 15-18.

<sup>4</sup> Edgar Schein, "From Brainwashing to Organizational Therapy," *Organizational Studies* 27, no. 2 (2006): 299.

much encouragement from the journal that published Ghoshals' paper – but I intend to try again.

I plan to attend the first two days of the Vancouver gathering en route from Melbourne to Marquette. I hope, at Marquette, to stimulate interest in developing an innovative program for business studies that would aim to uncover its foundations, a program that would be practical, critical, exploratory and self-focussed in the Lonergan sense. By way of example, I recall Mary Ann Glendon's talk at a Boston Workshop I attended. She told of her experience when invited by Joseph Flanagan to join a group of professors in the human sciences to assist in the founding of the Perspectives program he proposed to run at Boston College<sup>5</sup>. Each was asked to familiarize the others with the story of the development of their own discipline. "Easy", thought Mary Ann, only to discover rather quickly that she did not know. But her search lead her to unexpected places over the following year, including her "starting off on the spiralling path of self appropriation".

I am not at all under any illusion that introducing Lonergan to business studies would be easy. I suspect that there are subtle and gentle ways that would lead students willingly to 'the spiralling path of self appropriation'. To this end, I would be grateful for any SGEME members who may be interested to collaborate with me to develop practical ways to develop and implement such a program. The field of business studies is wide open and in great need. The time is indeed ripe!

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<sup>5</sup> Mary Ann Glendon, "Knowledge Makes a Noisy Entrance - the Struggle for Self-Appropriation in Law." *Lonergan Workshop 10* (1994): 119 - 144.