WRITING DAILY MACRO PRACTICE NOTES ON PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

By Moshe ben Asher, Ph.D.

This paper could have been titled, "*Not* Writing Daily Macro Practice Notes?" In social work schools, which are the most widely recognized source of graduate-level professional education for community organizing, case notes are an indispensible requirement of practice. The ideal is approached far more often among micro-oriented practitioners, however, than those working primarily in macro settings.

The crucial aspect of writing practice notes derives from their instrumentality in the social construction of our professional reality. What we come to define as the *meanings* of actions and events and their protagonists often reflects our practice notes; conversely, lack of clarity about our professional experience can often be traced to an absence of the benefits—reflection, analysis, and evaluation—associated with the discipline of writing daily practice notes.

OVERVIEW

Reasons for Recording

The explicit reasons for recording case notes in generalist practice are well known. Kirst-Ashman and Hull, among others, offer a comprehensive micro-oriented list in their textbook on generalist practice (although the additional bracketed items below illustrate macro dimensions as well): identifying the client [or beneficiary] and the need [or demand]; documenting services [or conditions, problems, and issues]; maintaining case [or campaign] continuity; inter-professional communication; sharing information with the client [or other beneficiaries]; facilitating supervision, consultation, and peer review; monitoring the process and impact of service [or actions, campaigns, and programs]; educating students and other professionals; providing data for administrative tasks; and providing data for research.[1]

Certainly all these reasons for recording practice notes apply to macro practice. We may extend their usefulness, however, by noting some of the differences between micro and macro practice (as suggested by the bracketed additions above). In macro practice we are not dealing primarily with "clients" but with a whole range of beneficiaries—members, residents, citizens, consumers, constituents, colleagues, etc. In macro practice we typically are not dealing with "need," which is ordinarily defined by experts and professionals from the top down, but with *demand* or *want*, which is defined from the bottom up, from the grassroots. In macro practice we are less interested in "services" than in conditions, problems and issues. In macro practice we are rarely focused on "cases," but typically our interest is in campaigns and projects, community organizing and development, and even organizational planning, administration, and evaluation.

Withal, it seems safe to say that practitioners who are planning, organizing, and administrating are less likely to develop and remain committed to the professional habit of writing practice notes on a day-to-day basis. The explanation for this often-missing dimension of macro practice has several aspects.

First, unlike micro practice, much of which in the last 75 years has taken its cues from a medical model in which case notes are de rigueur, macro practice reflects planning, organizing, and administrative models that are oriented not to ongoing process notes but occasional reports on progress, status, and completion.

The second reason, which follows from the first, is that macro practitioners are often involved in complex organizational, institutional or communal activities—these have scores, hundreds, or even thousands of participants—that don't usually lend themselves to documentation as cases. An additional complication is that the beginning and end of the practitioner's involvement may be fortuitous, almost random given the overall progression of events, and interactions between protagonists are often highly complex and difficult to place in neatly organized categories.

The third reason, which follows from the second, is that macro practitioners—especially organizers working in the urban action field of power, and active in the cycle of cooperation, competition, conflict, and negotiation—are often seen temperamentally as "cowboys." That is, they are often working alone, relying mostly on their own wits and experience, pressured to think and act quickly in a high-stakes game with tough

players who are out to win at all costs. Under the circumstances, many would argue that they have neither the resources nor compelling reasons to take the time needed to write daily practice notes.

Categories of Benefits

There are two broad categories of benefits to be gained from writing daily practice notes. The first category includes the benefits of disciplined reflection, systematic thinking, and strategic planning. In effect, the mental process of creating a written record of our work—prior to the actual writing of the record—produces substantial benefits. To fully understand this first category of benefits, we need to have a clear understanding of the theories, principles and practical guides that inform the recording of our work experience—and we'll consider them momentarily. The second category of benefits derives from the existence of the written record.

Withal, macro practitioners stand to gain equal or greater benefits from consistently and systematically writing practice notes that are equal professionally to those of their micro counterparts. Consider the following:

- Daily practice notes significantly increase the potential benefits of supervision and training by giving senior staff an ongoing picture of the organizer's day-to-day work experience.
- Practice notes, because they provide an extended overview of one's professional experience, usually much more than any person can consciously keep in mind, offer a functional, sometimes indispensable tool for developing macro strategy and tactics.
- Practice notes provide an important aid to memory, particularly in situations where there has been a hiatus of involvement by the organizer, which is not at all uncommon when moving from one project, campaign, organization, neighborhood, or community to another.
- Practice notes can be useful in developing funding proposals and grant applications when they make it possible to incorporate dynamic narrative, trenchant insights and quotations, and otherwise hard-to-come-by statistics.
- Practice notes can form the basis for justifying the allocation or expenditure of additional resources in the course of annual budgeting.
- Practice notes can be exceptionally informative sources in the development of training and education materials for staff.

But let's return to that first category of benefits—those that derive from the process required to create the notes. To shed light on that process, we have to answer two questions: What taxonomy do we use to organize the information that we record? And what information, specifically, do we record about our daily practice?

In the planner's world, practice notes are likely to be organized along project lines; they would be divided by project designations. Administrators are likely to arrange their notes according to organizational units (e.g., teams, divisions, and departments) or functional areas of authority (e.g., recruiting, training, supervision, or fundraising). Organizers, however, are much more likely to arrange their notes by issue, campaign, constituency, neighborhood, congregation, or community.

The more difficult question is *what* to record. Another way to approach this question is to ask, what are the theories, principles, and practice guides that inform our work as organizers?

Theoretical Foundations

For many years my work has benefited from a unified practice theory that integrates archetypal theories of social learning, social exchange, social construction of reality, and social development. Each of these theories offers a basis for understanding, predicting, and initiating action. They serve to sensitize one to the potentially most important facets of practice. (For more detail: http://www.gatherthepeople.org/Downloads/CO_THEORY.pdf.)

Social learning theory identifies prior cues, cognition, and rewarding and punishing consequences as the most observable and measurable correlates of human behavior. Learning theory recognizes the powerful operation of these behavioral contingencies in models. The models may not only be for individual or group behavior but also organizational structure, processes, and instrumental objectives. The models may apply to micro behavior, for instance motivating people to pitch in on a project by personally serving as a model; mezzo, for example using a role-play to illustrate negotiation techniques; or macro, such as proposing a multistate chapter development plan. Needless to say, our daily notes should explicate the significant contingencies and the instances of modeling, plus their consequences, which we observe in practice.

Exchange theory helps organizers identify and influence accumulations and flows of resources more effectively. Exchange contingencies are especially helpful in pinpointing conditions of power, declining marginal utility,[2] and distributive injustice. So, of course, our practice notes should, whenever possible, identify the operation of these contingencies.

Social construction of reality theory guides the organizer's role in facilitating understanding of reality as an ideologically biased social construction, and orchestrating the development of new ideological realities that serve the broad public interest in contrast to those dominated by elites and their special interests. Theory-based guides to practice include keeping track of and retelling organizational history; identifying potential causes of important events and outcomes, and focusing on those that provide the most organizational mileage[3]; mediating the post-action consensual

validation of ideological meanings that are critical to organizational movement and progress; and, when necessary, shattering the consensual validations of organizational opponents.[4] These guides obviously have an important sensitizing function in thinking about what to record in practice notes.

Social development theory implicitly recognizes that the development of social infrastructure is biased according to whether its sponsorship is from the top down or the bottom up, with contrasting ideological characteristics as shown below when the two forms are cast as ideal types.

Bottom-Up	Top-Down
SOCIAL CONTRACT	DIVINE RIGHT
Governments are formed and exist by consent of the governed.	Certain individuals and classes rule because of special qualities.
COMMUNITY	MASS ORGANIZATION
Face-to-face relations are best for preventing and treating pathologies of modern social life.	Hierarchical organization is necessary and best to manage complex industrial societies.
POLITICS	TECHNOLOGY
Solutions to problems of social life are mainly political.	Technical expertise is the best way to alleviate social problems.
DIRECT ACTION	SOCIAL CONTROL
The public good requires large numbers of citizens to act directly in self-governance.	Citizen participation must be "guided" to ensure continued (private) capital accumulation.
SELF-HELP	SERVICE
Local initiative and cooperation best satisfy programmatic needs.	Mass organizations must provide programs and services under professional management.
DEMAND	NEED
Public resources should be allocated according to citizen demand.	Public resources are best distributed by expert definitions of need.
REDISTRIBUTION	DISTRIBUTION
Resources should be *redistributed* to permanently alter relations of power.	Resources should be *distributed* to relieve extreme human suffering and to buffer citizen discontent.
DEMOCRATIZATION OF SURPLUS	EXTERNALIZATION OF COSTS
Surplus accumulation from labor productivity should benefit the general public.	Public expenditures should continue to subsidize private wealth by assuming externalized costs.

The theory highlights the overt functions of infrastructure—political, economic, planning, service, and religious; and it brings into awareness the covert functions, which are *socio-maintenance* by social construction of reality and socialization, and *socio-therapy* through social bonding and flourishing of personality via engagement in social action.

The theory prescribes that organizing forego revolutionary and electoral strategies, using the latter only tactically, in favor of bottom-up creation of social infrastructure. Bottom-up-sponsored organizing is favored as a means to politically and economically empower the general citizenry.

Social development theory also favors removing planning and service delivery from the domination of top-down public and private bureaucratic interests that oppose more equitable distribution of income, goods, and services, and redistribution of basic political and economic resources, their costs and benefits.

These and other theoretical propositions serve to sensitize the organizer to critical aspects of practice and what to record.

Documentation Principles
Macro practice notes may identify experts, decision-makers, and power players; include commentary on key contacts—what happened, why it's important, and implications for follow-up; and highlight reflections—strengths and weaknesses, professional and personal impacts, tactical and strategic implications, focus and priority of planning, training needs, progress against quarterly objectives, and long-term evaluations.

Practice notes become a more powerful learning and teaching tool when they are not only "snapshots" of momentary events but "movies" of ongoing development and change. So we may use them to identify themes and commonalities that are revealed in multiple contacts; they may indicate the status of relationships and their progress or lack of it in specified timeframes; they may describe social constructions of reality and learning and exchange contingencies that are developing among players; and, when possible, they may document growth of individual and organizational willingness to take risks or otherwise make investments over time.

Major initiatives may be recorded in detail, with accompanying commentary on what worked and how, what didn't work and why, and positive and negative outcomes. In general, observations, analysis, commentary, and conclusions are communicated more effectively when recorded with contextual information.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

The following examples of macro practice notes certainly do not represent the ideal form of their genre. They are offered here as illustrations because their content is thought to merit documentation. It should also be noted that they are based entirely on my work as a community and congregational organizer, exclusive of any planning and administrative experience. And since these examples are only illustrations of organizing experience, not a historical record, individual and organizational names have been altered.

Leadership Development
Some macro practitioners believe that mentoring leaders is the sine qua non of community organizing and development. Many organizers regard it as both the essential method of the work and its process objective. This viewpoint is reflected in the guideline, "Whatever the problem, whatever the solution, *do leadership development!*"

The following paragraphs present examples of documenting the development of leadership qualities in community organizing settings. First, there is a brief description of two emerging leaders; then a description of an established clergy-leader follows; and the last example documents instances when individuals

demonstrated leadership potential that was unexpected by staff.

> Tom was disruptive again, but this time he was a foil for the rest of the [leadership] group. In particular, Gloria and Roberta showed wit and style in dealing with him.
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> When he started talking about working simultaneously on all of the issues related to drugs, such as gangs, graffiti, and truancy, Gloria responded that it would be better as a new organization to take on one issue and win it before going on to the next.
>
> When he left the room for a half-hour and then came back, disrupting the meeting to ask what had happened while he was gone, Roberta told him that he'd have to stay in the meeting to find out those things or ask someone after the meeting was over.
>
> Both impressed me as having real leadership potential.

> Good 1:1 this week with Fr. Jim Julian of St. Agnes, a real start on exploring his leadership approach—or lack of it.
>
> He has a broad blind spot on strategic thinking in the areas of staff and leadership development. Although in a general way he's able to acknowledge that he has no overall strategy for staff development and building teams, he tends to have a hard time recognizing and owning the practical implications of that deficiency. For instance, he's heavily triangulated between staff and leaders, but "can't identify" when the issue is raised—yet in the course of our meeting he had to excuse himself twice to manage very minor details of the parish operation.
>
> For all intents and purposes he's written off three of his staff: Fr. Jose who "has worked out his own world," and Maria and Sr. Carmen, both of whom he regards as incompetent and incapable of growth and development.

> The biggest surprise for me was Nick. He covered the details thoroughly, and then he added his own opinions—with real feeling—about the importance and effectiveness of the group. Undoubtedly he's been in the background because he's monolingual Spanish-speaking, but we should challenge him to get up front.
>
> Alfred expressed his own style and wandered a bit, but overall I thought he was unusually effective. The high points: We need to act to deal with problems in our own community. We need leaders, people who have the right qualities, not perfect skills. Leaders are "learned," not born. You can do it—if you wait for others you'll get nothing.
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> He asked if drugs are a problem for people, acknowledging affirmative answers but not really encouraging discussion (although, to be fair, I suggested in our prep that discussion be kept brief). He asked, "Can we develop leaders through working on the drug problem?" Nick answered with feeling, "yes—we need to organize and educate ourselves to live in this country."
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> One of Alfred's best comments was that "we have to honor our faith . . . and act." He concluded by asking rhetorically if people are willing to go see public officials, do research, etc.

It's always valuable to document the development of leaders over time, to record chronologically the leadership qualities they demonstrate. Consider the emerging qualities of newly identified leaders at a major action:

> Some overall thoughts on the development of the upfront leaders: All three—Rick, Rosa, and Al—showed charismatic leadership qualities, although in very different ways.
>
> They all projected competence and commitment. In different ways they all <u>forcefully and convincingly</u> pre-

sented positive challenges—Rick asked people to link their faith to action, Rosa asked them to confront power, and Al asked them to commit themselves to the practical work yet to be done.

> Overall, they're looking and sounding much more like leaders.

The ability of leaders to evaluate their own growth and performance is a key benchmark of leadership development. Recording such progress serves as a reminder to professional staff that they should encourage the modeling of such behavior as a teaching tool for other leaders.

> Pastor Bob is having less difficulty talking about his leadership style, although I'm not clear why. He focused explicitly on what he does that doesn't work, which is to concentrate his efforts in making contact with the congregation's members through his pulpit preaching. He does, of course, also make contact through participation in committees, meetings, and classes, but apparently with little capacity to use those opportunities for building relationships.
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> He acknowledged it's not enough "to let people know what I think is important and then delegate it to them." He's beginning to let go of the idea that leadership is something that people mostly either have or not, and that its hallmark is the ability to administer the institution. His practice has been to chair the nominating committee for all officers and "always [be] on the lookout for good leaders," that is, "folks who can run things, who are bright, can reason, make good choices, and do a job."
>
> He acknowledges that he hasn't been mentoring people, that he doesn't know them well enough to do that—he's beginning to recognize the relationship deficits—and that the long-range planning committee is thinking about supporting some kind of leadership training.

Training & Education

Professional practice invariably engages its practitioners in a wide variety of education and training experiences. Unfortunately, much valuable material is lost for all practical purposes when organizers fail to adopt a systematic approach to recording, labeling, and filing such material.

The continued improvement of Dragon Naturally Speaking (DNS), the most advanced consumer-grade dictation software, particularly the accuracy and extensive features of the PC version, has dramatically lessened the demands of recording professional notes. It is no longer necessary to write or type notes; instead they may be dictated directly into a computer text file, with almost no corrections needed. The notes can be dictated on the fly using a hand-held recorder approved for use with DNS, readable later by desktop versions of the program that translate audio recording into editable text.

Practice notes recorded chronologically are an ideal location for keeping details of training initiatives. Since the notes are used on a daily basis, they're virtually never mislaid, and they're easily searchable as electronic files by name, date, subject, and key words. With notes on training and education experience so easily accessible, they're much more likely to be used by a project's second and third generations of organizers.

A simple but useful practice tool gleaned from training is the questioning-recipe to prepare members for actions. For example, when preparing for an action with several hundred neighborhood-residents at a city council meeting, the following questions—developed during a training segment of a staff meeting—were raised and answered on how to handle particular circumstances that often occur in such situations—to wit:

- What do we do after one of our speakers addresses the council? We applaud!
- What do we do if the mayor says that applause is not permitted? We stop.
- But then what do we do if another one of our people speaks? We applaud!
- What do we do if another speaker insults us or says something bigoted? Nothing!
- What do we do if something happens we don't like or a member of the council opposes us? We groan!
- What do we do if a reporter approaches us and begins asking questions? We direct the reporter to a leader or designated spokesperson.

It shouldn't be necessary for every generation of upcoming organizers to reinvent such useful training materials.

Multiculturalism & Human Diversity

The commitment to multiculturalism has been an important development during the past two or three decades. Although there has been a great deal of attention devoted to multicultural micro practice, with many reports in the professional literature, the same is not true in the macro arena, especially in practice oriented to building political and economic power among the powerless in the Alinsky tradition.

Recording of multicultural and cross-cultural experience in power-oriented practice is essential to encourage the reflection and analysis needed to generate more effective approaches. The snippets of documentation that follow illustrate some of the political considerations, the practical problems of organizing in ethnic and cultural minority communities, problematic approaches to working with them by non-indigenous organizers, and inspiring possibilities of working within multicultural settings.

> One-to-one with the project director: Talked with him briefly about his experience with the black Baptist churches in the city, which he candidly says has been mostly a bust. He does say, however, that a couple of projects [in other cities] have had some success.
> I conclude that the key hurdles (which don't exist in all cases) to bring black Baptist churches into the project are to deal effectively with the following probable situations and circumstances: the pastor has already established political connections and relationships and enjoys effective power brokering for his people; the tradition and practice here is for the pastor to be a "maximum leader" and rarely delegate authority; the pastor will not move his congregation in the direction of social action without a scriptural basis; and there may well be among the leadership and with the pastor, attitudes that preclude them from affiliating with an outside, mostly white organization.

> Talked with Sr. Joan regarding St. Anthony's, which has roughly equal proportions of Latinos, Vietnamese, and Anglos. The basic organizing difficulty is language, which is compounded by our general ignorance of Vietnamese culture. The break that they [i.e., the Vietnamese parishioners] got was in the form of a new deacon who's Vietnamese and supportive of the organizing. Nonetheless, without the support of the Vietnamese priest, the organizing simply will not move. As it is, in a recent accountability action that turned out 250, only 15 were Vietnamese.
> At meetings of the parish organizing committee the number [of Vietnamese] is three or four. Large actions are trilingual, with short translated summaries. Regular meetings are not translated because both Latinos and Vietnamese who attend are bilingual. The community is divided by generations, both in respect to age and length of time in the country. More traditional leaders, including the priest, want to create a US version of Vietnam, keeping families entirely removed from American culture and institutions. If the Vietnamese priest were truly supportive, the Vietnamese turnouts at actions would increase significantly.
> While family life is the center of Vietnamese culture, a significant proportion of parish Vietnamese families—say 25 percent—are problem-ridden and typically do not share their problems, at least not with outsiders. Large numbers of young people, who came to the U.S. before their parents and who were taken in by other families, are effectively without parenting. Many have left their "foster" families and are involved in gang and drug activity.
> The drug problem is potentially the most unifying issue to bring the church's different ethnic/cultural groups together. I think the key is the Vietnamese priest (not the Monsignor) who's our real challenge. We should also meet ASAP with the two new Vietnamese members of the parish council.
> One question that comes to mind about this situation is how deeply we should rely on the acknowledged Vietnamese leaders to deal with their own community—and at the moment I'm inclined to say a great deal.

> Phone one-to-one with Cecile: Told her that I had heard she was turned off by the first planning-group meeting and that I would like to have her honest feedback, whatever her decision about future participation.
> She said that the process made her feel "patronized" and "railroaded." She also almost blurted out her anger that "two white men" were running everything, but she caught herself. When I pressed for details, she said that David was "really insulting and patronizing"—he did in fact dismiss her concerns—and she assumed that because he had been involved with the project from the beginning, I must have endorsed his behavior and statements. She made a point of the fact that we approached the group with a ready-made plan, which she obviously resented, and added, "the meeting wasn't grassroots."
> She seemed most offended by the fact that at the first meeting we asked people to make commitments to bring members of specific racial and ethnic groups to the next meeting. When I reminded her that as we went around the room, many people—including her—had refused, and then the group had made it clear that they would only make general commitments, she contradicted me and said that her understanding was that everyone had to bring someone of a specific racial or ethnic group. It was clear that she felt used and that she was being asked to use other people. When she was telling about being patronized, she was actually yelling at me over the phone. She said her belief was that we had a hidden agenda.

> I had an informal one-to-one on the front porch with Joyce [up and coming African-American action team leader] from the Sunshine Gardens neighborhood. She called to me as I was door-knocking on the other side of the street, saying she wanted to talk. When I walked over

and asked her, "What's up?" she started talking very excitedly about the recent founding meeting and the action in the park with the police patrol-division commander. She's very optimistic that we're going to get the gangs out of the park and take it back for families in the neighborhood.

Then she says to me, "You know, I'm sure that God sent you to our neighborhood to help us deal with all the horrible things that have been happening." To which I answered, "Of course, God sent me to help—but then God also sent Alice and Bob and Luisa, and all the other people who are working together to deal with the problems."

Then, out of the blue, she says, "You know, I was talking with Betty the other day and she asked me, 'What do you think of that <u>white</u> organizer?' And I said, 'What <u>white</u> organizer?' And she yells back at me, 'Moshe!' And I said, 'He's not white!' And we got into a big argument. But I realized when I saw you across the street that you are white—I guess I didn't notice before."

Populations & Problems

While it's true that virtually all organizers understand the need to gather relevant demographic data at the outset of their work with a community, often the data available through conventional sources (such as the census) are only the first step. They must be supplemented with data from local law enforcement agencies, school districts, hospitals and health departments, and a variety of private agencies and organizations.

In the case of congregational and union organizing—commonly called "institutional" organizing—it's essential that the organizer understand the demographic makeup of the institution. The following information, for example, was gathered from the secretary of a large Catholic parish.

Our church is very complex racially and ethnically, with about 45 percent white, 35 percent Vietnamese, and 20 percent Latino. The total number of parishioners is estimated at 5,500. The groups are isolated and there's a good deal of fear, mistrust, and white flight. The Vietnamese proportion is expanding very fast, with estimates that at least half are bilingual. Probably less than 30 percent of the parish resides in the city.

As with demographic data, social problems can be identified through a variety of sources, many of which make statistical reports available to the public. Such studies, while invaluable, often lack anecdotal information.

The value of using grassroots sources to identify and verify social problems is that often they are directly connected to individuals who have personally suffered from the problems and who may be motivated to actively work for change and to give compelling testimony in public actions.

The following paragraph documents the social problems reported to me by the staff of one church with which I was working.

Concerns mentioned by staff were as follows: Dolores—families with two working parents, latchkey kids, families doubled-up and tripled-up in apartments, juvenile delinquency, and real estate rip-offs; Jerry—teenage pregnancy, lack of church resources to offer counseling, drug use, and overwhelming issues related to housing, jobs, and parenting; Ina—economic problems of newly-arrived families, drugs, and gangs forming in 4th and 5th grades; Mary—problems of the elderly, young girls with babies on welfare, school children with low esteem, Hispanics being "scammed"; Cortez—difficult for newly-arrived to get decent paying work, citizenship a problem, and involvement with drugs and crime, resulting in family disintegration.

Strategy & Planning

Most organizers operating in the arena of organizational and institutional power understand that "planning is everything but plans are nothing," or to paraphrase one army general, no plan survives contact with the opposition.[5] Organizers recognize the absolute necessity of strategic thinking and planning, but they also know that planning is continuous and plans must be reshaped constantly to accommodate changing conditions.

That being the case, documenting the various stages of strategic thinking is essential if we want to evaluate campaigns and the achievement of medium- to long-term objectives and goals.

In the leadership working-committee I laid out an analysis of the situation—to wit: Smith [parks & rec department deputy director] probably wants the community center, but at no cost to himself [i.e., not out of his budget, etc.]; and he wants to make sure that if the Consortium [which includes both city officials and community members] makes a recommendation his bosses don't like, he's in a position [via the outside consultants employed by the city] to pull the plug on the recommendations of <u>our</u> organization's planning consultant. The critical unknown in the situation is whether the mayor and/or the [city] council have decided to torpedo any recommendation for a center, or, on the other hand, whether they're open to the idea under certain circumstances. The critical question for the working-committee is what to do if Smith refuses to back off from a position of demanding that the city's consultants supervise (and undermine) our consultant's plan.

I suggested to our people that they should look at this session as essentially a negotiation. Thus we have to ask ourselves, what's our bottom line? What do we gain by staying and what do we gain by walking if Smith refuses to budge? All indications are that, when push comes to shove, the council will try to torpedo any recommendation for a center in the neighborhood. Whether we have to deal with the problem when our study is completed and the other consultants reject it, or shortly thereafter when the council does, won't make much difference. But if we walk now, escalating the battle, we create a situation where they can say we refused to participate—and we're in no condition to start the campaign right now.

The strategy I proposed is that we fight for process rather than particulars. I suggested the following tactics for the meeting: If Smith comes in wanting to go over his concerns about the Consortium proposal, we respond positively and get into that with him. If he comes in asking where we want to start, we suggest that the group go over his concerns about the proposal. If he comes in pushing to have the city's consultants involved, we push to first review his concerns about the proposal, then discuss the question of another consultant.

The negotiating principle here is that the easy stuff should always be taken first. If he raises the concern that the study will take too long or cost too much, we respond by saying that our consultant should be called back, asked to explain her proposed costs, and then the committee should meet again and decide what to do. When we get to the issue of other consultants, our basic line is to cry foul—repeatedly making the point that it's a breach of faith, not to mention unnecessary. If he insists, we don't walk but make it clear that we're very unhappy. I also sug-

gested that once our leaders have made their points on the question, they should stop talking—period, letting him face a silent room for as long as possible. My sense is that we can overwhelm them with process in which we make them live up to their own rules.

I suggested to Dorothy [a neighborhood leader very angry at Smith]—she seemed to get it—that in war the two sides are trying to kill each other, literally. But all wars have to end, usually by negotiation, and when they do it's necessary to temporarily put one's feelings "in a back pocket" during the negotiations. I also explained to her that for a negotiation to be successful, both sides have to "win"—except when there's an unconditional surrender, which isn't going to happen here.

Research & Accountability Actions

Research actions targeting experts and decision-makers are often the first opportunity that many citizens have to encounter elected and appointed officials face-to-face regarding "the public's business." In research with *experts*, the purpose of the action is mainly to gather information. Research targeting *decision-makers*, however, goes beyond gathering information to take the measure of the official, possibly determining how he or she will decide and vote on a particular issue, and to communicate the organization's credential, purpose, position on an issue, and potential power.

Research actions are typically conducted by relatively small groups of six to ten members. On occasion, however, 50 or more members may participate if the official is known to be particularly intransigent or arrogant.

The importance of fully documenting findings from research actions should not be underestimated. Such findings are made available to all members of the community or organization and, in turn, form the basis for choosing issues, devising strategy, and planning campaigns and tactics.

The research action with the mayor was a mixed bag. Turnout was good, with representatives from the active city churches. Generally I think our people got stronger as the meeting went on, i.e., asked more questions and pressed harder on them—particularly Ray, Roger, and Andrea—but often their questions were not on point. They also failed to convey that our interest is countywide.

The mayor came in like gang-busters—loud voice, projecting presence, etc.—trailed by two plainclothes cops: Lt. Sanders, the area commander for the north side, and Detective Hale, head of special investigations (including narcotics). Angel, extremely nervous, not only butchered our credential but also projected a very weak image of our organization's leadership. Clearly he didn't understand what we represent, at one point saying that, "it's always a problem getting our people to these meetings." (Aarrrggg!)

The first 20 minutes of the meeting were largely wasted, with the mayor going into long condescending explanations of the conditions in the city that complicate solutions, and our people sitting quietly passive, failing entirely to make clear that our interest was in his views on the drug problem. After a time, however, our people began to ask questions about the problem and how the mayor might respond to any initiatives we take with the council.

He was heavily focused on "limited resources." He also alluded to the development-oriented rationale that for every $2 in city services received by residential house-

holds, that household only pays $1 in taxes—and of course that the difference has to be made up by attracting business and commercial development. Early in his comments he stated that his first priority was "to ease fears for safety" in the community; but later he noted that, "for us, the number one problem is drugs." Obviously he had begun to feel the pressure that a couple of dozen congregations and parishes could put on him.

When the mayor was pressed on using nuisance abatement laws, he finally said that he'd be willing and interested to look at what other cities are doing if there are successful models. He's sensitive to the problems associated with real estate agents selling to absentee landlords, which feeds the problem of chronic over-occupancy. He rejected the idea of shared jail space, pointing out that very few cells are potentially involved.

When pressed on his own ideas, he declared, "I'm not so creative that I've come up with a plan." But minutes later he confided, "I'm proposing a three year plan." This apparently is to involve working with the police department and city manager on a "fugitive unit," in cooperation with larger cities that have many undocumented people. He added that his plan would involve a three-year police department program aimed at gangs and drugs, primarily by recruiting local kids into the department.

The mayor declared, "I want rehab centers throughout the county, but the [County] Supervisors are an obstacle because they don't want them in unincorporated areas and none of the cities are willing to have them." He didn't seem to know the difference between detoxification and residential treatment. He was clear that the city relies on the county to provide treatment resources, and was receptive to working with a group that would press for state legislation to bring in new monies for treatment and prevention.

One of the most useful pieces of information we got regarding the mayor is that he apparently has little or no working relationship with the development-oriented majority on the council. When asked whom we should be talking with, he responded twice by mentioning council members who have consistently opposed development.

It's especially productive to document what research actions reveal about the contradictions between official rhetoric and the results of our own action research.

The following example is typical in the particulars of those contradictions.

Official Rhetoric	Action Research Findings
Everything possible is being done.	Options are rejected out of hand.
There is no money for new programs.	This is no money for *this* new program.
It's a priority for us and we support you.	No resources are to be allocated.
This is *your* problem.	Officials claim to be public interest experts.
This is a victimless crime.	Our children and we are the victims.
We're getting an 80% conviction rate.	And releasing them all as misdemeanants.
We want community input.	There's no real interest in partnership.

When the organization has achieved a "win," we want to document not only the instrumental achievement, such as a commitment to fund new low-income housing units or a new battered women's shelter, but also the "builds"—that is, the process gains, such as

leadership development, improved turnout numbers, more disciplined mobilizations, etc.

The following brief notes document not only the winning of increased foot patrols in a neighborhood park, but an acknowledged change in relations of power between the neighborhood organization and the police department leadership.

> We now have established a relationship with the top leadership of the department—we're becoming a player in their decision-making about policing in the neighborhood—so we can continue to press them as particular problems arise.
>
> At present they will <u>not</u> make commitments to <u>permanent</u> personnel assignments. But they will now have six Area C uniformed officers regularly assigned to patrol the park, and they'll remain assigned as long as there is "citizen demand" for them.

Even with thorough and thoughtful strategizing and planning, crisis situations inevitably arise. The unexpected occurs and we're caught unprepared. While we can only do our best in such situations, drawing on all the resources we have at hand, we can document them and also document our post-action analysis of how they may be better handled in the future.

In this way, over time, we build a database of responses to the most common kinds of unforeseen situations that have damaging or destructive potential.

The practice notes that follow reflect a staff-meeting discussion following an action in which a local elected official tried to take over the meeting and the organization's leaders were intimidated and failed to maintain their control.

> There is an ongoing issue in organizing of when an organizer should intervene in a meeting or action to directly change the agenda, the performance of a leader, or the organizer's own planned part or performance.
>
> Two key principles need to be respected: (1) it's essential to act on [mental] flashes we have about what's happening, i.e., subtle indications that things are going seriously wrong; and (2) it's essential to keep in communication with other staff at the meeting to compare observations and reactions.
>
> In a major meeting or action, however, we should never jerk members or the agenda around, except to avoid a catastrophe, which doesn't preclude speaking up to add ideas or make suggestions when necessary or useful and not undermining leaders.
>
> One's own role as an organizer, however, should be changed or dropped in consultation with other staff, to deal with changing conditions or fast-breaking problems.

Ongoing Practice Challenges

Training and workshop sessions are regularly scheduled in virtually all organizations that adhere to professional standards. In the best of all possible worlds, every trainer figuratively stands on the shoulders of the organization's previous trainers, learning from their presentations, both their successes and mistakes.

Documenting evaluations of training sessions is especially important when writing practice notes. It increases the probability that the organization's training capacity will show constant, long-term gains.

> The leadership training was a mixed bag. Generally turnout was good to excellent, with reps from virtually all of the city units. The downside on turnout was that roughly half of the leaders present are not in the top-line leadership group.
>
> Strengths of the workshop included review and reinforcement of the functions of research actions, providing a conceptual overview of campaigns, and legitimization of uncertainty as a key characteristic of organizing in particular and campaigns in general.
>
> Weaknesses included: very inefficient use of the first hour—many more serious questions should have been teased out before proceeding; failure to exploit an excellent opportunity for expression of uncertainty, doubt, and fear; shallow Socratic challenges, eliciting one-line answers rather than offering opportunities for sinking intellectual and emotional teeth into hard questions; little or no tolerance for constructive silence; and far too little substantive grappling (by leaders) with tasks, logistics, and labor division required in major mobilizations for upcoming actions.

> Good first workshop at St. Boniface. Turnout was 45, balanced between English- and Spanish-speaking, with a number of monolinguals present and participating.
>
> Energy and participation were generally okay, but I wasn't entirely satisfied. I would've liked to hear more details from a wider spectrum of people in the room.
>
> Fr. Alfredo did a good job chairing. While the blessing/reflection went on a bit too long, he had everyone sing Amazing Grace at the start and end of the meeting, which had a good effect. He was an excellent balance between efficiency and the serious purpose of the meeting and having a good time with jokes and laughter.
>
> Also gratifying was that several key parish leaders who had not been willing to meet with me for a one-to-one were present and they seemingly bought in.
>
> The most problematic part of the meeting for me was the time doing introductions, but I think it paid off, as it has elsewhere, and we finished on time nonetheless, even though we started eight minutes late. It did seriously cut short David's time—he had to stay within the 10 minutes allowed on the agenda!
>
> The weakest aspect of the meeting was the meeting room—too small, too warm, and located next to the community center in which there was another meeting with loud music.
>
> We had 24 at the post-meeting evaluation! Their key learnings were related to themes of unity, common problems, meeting new people, common goals, excitement about organizing, and good representation of the parish. Monolinguals were mostly positive about the translation. The message about building relationships got through. The attached sheet lists people who stood out as leaders. Critical reactions included: at future sessions we break into smaller groups, that we develop more detailed analyses of the problems that we identified, and that we use handouts.

Pocket Guide

When all is said and done, there are some simple, easily remembered "rules" we should keep in the form of a pocket guide, so we always have them as a reminder when we're writing practice notes.

There are many such guides, and this variation on the theme simply reflects my own belatedly discovered mistakes over the years.

- Identify people fully (i.e., full name, title, organization, email, phone number, etc.).[6]
- Avoid labels and instead operationally define behavior and situations.

- Distinguish observations and facts from opinions and conclusions.
- Include reasons and evidence for opinions and conclusions.
- Include direct quotations whenever possible.
- Include numbers and statistics whenever available.
- Avoid abbreviations.

- Explicitly identify confidential information that is *not* in the "public square."
- Protect notes from unauthorized access.
- Give a copy of your notes to a supervisor or mentor every week.
- Make a backup copy of your notes.

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[1] Karen K. Kirst-Ashman and Grafton H. Hull, Jr., *Understanding Generalist Practice* (3d ed.), (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2002), pp. 527-29.

[2] Declining marginal utility in mezzo and macro settings is roughly comparable to the dynamics and effects of deprivation and satiation in micro settings.

[3] Organizational mileage, like automobile mileage, is a measure of the "distance traveled" by an organization—in effect, its instrumental, process, and structural achievements (or "wins" and "builds")—for a given input of resources.

[4] As Warren Haggstrom wrote in "The Power Bind" (unpublished) many years ago [and currently available online at http://www.gatherthepeople.org/Downloads/WCH_POWER_BIND.pdf], an organization's ability to influence the actions of its opponents, to disable or disarm them, depends to a significant extent on shattering their consensual validations of reality. For example, to the degree that one convinces an opponent that there is no hope of acquiring needed resources to survive or, as with General U.S. Grant, convinces an opponent that no matter what, one's own initiatives will persist until the opponent relents and agrees to negotiate in good faith, the shattering of the opposition's reality is disarming and disabling.

[5] Brigadier General, Rhonda Cornum, Ph.D., M.D., U.S. Army (Ret.)

[6] The failure to do so often comes back to haunt us months or years later when we need the person's correct title or organizational affiliation.

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