**INTRODUCTION TO THE THEORY OF ORGANISATION OF CLODOMIR DE MORAIS\***

# Origins of the Organisation Workshops

**The Organization Workshops were first created in Brazil in the mid 1950s by Clodomir Santos de Morais. Brazil was then (as it still is now, albeit to a lesser extent) a subcontinent of extreme inequality; where the poor stood in lines several blocks long for government-subsidized meals at 5 Cruzieros while businessmen lunched in luxury hotels at 200 Cruzieros a throw ; where poverty was exacerbated by galloping inflation;[[1]](#footnote-2) where the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul had living standards comparable to central Europe, while in the vast North-east (where the Organization Workshops were born) poverty levels matched the worst of Africa and Asia. In the mid 1950s Brazil was industrializing at a dizzying pace; its flamboyant president (from 1955 to 1960) Juscelino Kubitschek claimed to make “fifty-years-of-progress-in-five”;[[2]](#footnote-3) the exurbs of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro filled with factories; while the landless labourers of the North East, most of whom were descendants of slaves, and whose de facto status had changed little with emancipation (slaves were not freed in Brazil until 1888), essentially remained still in the middle of the twentieth century in the old world of the *Casa Grande* (big house) and the *Senzla* (slave quarters—now converted to tiny row houses). [[3]](#footnote-4)**

**The immediate context of the emergence of the Organisation Workshop was the struggles of the Peasants Leagues in the North-east,[[4]](#footnote-5) and particularly their early organisation within the state of Pernambuco. The background of the formation of the Leagues was the expulsion of small farmers in order to convert the land to raising cattle for export, although it is said that the incident that sparked the first revolt during that time period in Pernambuco was the failure of a large landowner to comply with a custom that required him to supply a coffin for burial when one of his workers died. The charismatic leader of the Leagues was Francisco Juliao, a lawyer and a socialist member of the Brazilian congress. Juliao successfully defended the peasants of the Galilea plantation against an owner who wanted to evict his tenants in order to turn the land over to cattlemen. Indeed he turned the tables by getting Galilea expropriated by the government and distributed among the peasants who farmed it. Juliao divided the poor of Pernambuco into economic types that translated into psychological types making them more or less easy to organize. Juliao divided the population into first the proletariat, or rural salaried workers; second the semi-proletariat who had only temporary and irregular employment; and third the peasants, who had some form of control over land, either as sharecroppers, renters, squatters, holders of dubious titles, or small property owners. He considered the third group, the peasants, and especially the *precaristas* among the peasants (those whose claim to land was tenuous) the most capable of resisting the large landowners.[[5]](#footnote-6)**

**Notwithstanding Juliao’s official standing as a lawyer and member of congress, and even though the heavy repression of military dictatorship did not begin until April of 1964, in the 1950s the Leagues led a virtually clandestine existence. The landowners controlled the countryside *de facto*, and for the most part they controlled the police in the cities too. Brazil had a moderately progressive Civil Code, but peasants alone would never dare to enforce the letter of the law (when it was in their favour) against their traditional masters. The Peasant Leagues found political backing and a measure of protection in the creation of an urban support group formed by liberal professionals and parliamentary deputies. In addition to extending the “immunities they [the parliamentary deputies] enjoyed as representatives of the people” [[6]](#footnote-7) to the peasant groups in their regular visits – thus helping to prevent police attack – the urban leaders gave the peasant movement a broader base by connecting it with the urban masses. The involvement of the urban professionals brought strategic clarity to the leagues, including its focus on the *precaristas*.[[7]](#footnote-8)**

**Juliao, who had not been able to repeat his spectacular success at *fazenda*  Galilea. He and the other leaders were very aware of the contradictions between the Civil Code of the country and the traditional power of the large landowners. Their strategy was to make rather modest demands. They pushed for the effective application of the Civil Code, thus seeking to create greater organizing space while “creating a consciousness and politicizing the peasantry.” [[8]](#footnote-9) In this situation much work was done by various urban professionals; medical and law students, civil lawyers, political agitators, and even theatre groups that entertained and politically educated the peasant families. Clodomir De Morais, the creator of the Organization Workshop methodology became one of those supporting urban professionals.**

**As it turned out, the ferment of activity involving organisational linkages between grassroots actors and middle class intellectuals was to have consequences far beyond Pernambuco and even beyond Brazil. In addition to the Moraisian methodology I consider here, it helped to stimulate the much better known literacy and pedagogic method associated with Paulo Freire. [[9]](#footnote-10)**

**The insights that gave rise to the OW method were an unanticipated consequence of a course for middle-level leadership on agrarian reform and law**

**\*Excerpted from *Unbounded Organizaton: Embracing the Societal Enterprise,* a forthcoming book by Gavin Andersson with the assistance of Howard Richards.**

**conducted in Recife, the capital of the province of Pernambuco. One of the participants in the course was an Afro-Brazilian who had been born in the North-east, but who had grown up in Sao Paulo, where he had become an assembly line worker at Ford Motors, a trade union activist, sometimes a jazz musician, a successful journalist, and secretly a member of a political movement that had been banned since 1947. [[10]](#footnote-11) The ferment of activity in the North-east drew him back to the province of his birth, where he opened his own news agency in Recife and earned a law degree in the same city. He joined a course for 45 people that was carried out under clandestine conditions at a family home normally accommodating seven people in a heavily policed part of the city. Participants assembled gradually over several days, so as not to attract attention. They undertook the 30-day course – with classes given at night requiring that people spoke in low voices – and also reproduced teaching materials, kept the home clean, cooked, held study groups, organized recreation during the day, ensured health care and arranged other activities, all in a highly disciplined manner. They then dispersed over a period of a week.**

**Six months later when the course was evaluated it emerged that each of these people had made a remarkable contribution in their own communities as leaders, in some cases in marked contrast to their behaviour and impact before the course. Although much of the detail of the course had been forgotten, the skills associated with running it had been retained. Rather than learning agrarian law, each participant had developed strong organisational skills! The native son who had returned from Sao Paulo, Clodomir Santos de Morais, thought deeply about this unexpected outcome. He observed that the necessity to work in secrecy, with a relatively large number of people, had provided the imperative to learn about organisation. “I learned nothing new about the theory as it was a pretty elementary course… but I learned an enormous lot in matters of organisation; *above all how the existence of a commonly owned resource pool becomes a capacitating factor in the organisation of popular movements*.” [[11]](#footnote-12) (Italics added.) Importantly, in his estimation, the experience had led the participants to assimilate fully the concept of the division of labour: there was a careful analysis of the complex work into its constituent parts, then planning and allocation of tasks to teams, with reflection on performance after each set of activities. Further there was need to observe basic organisational principles: maintaining discipline and unity amongst participants had involved learning the use of constructive criticism, and meetings skills amongst other things. The rhythms of activity established in this learning event had provided participants with all the tools and abilities needed by an organizer. This insight led de Morais to think about other practical exercises where, a shared resource base, a practical activity and the need for analytical thought[[12]](#footnote-13) would stimulate formation[[13]](#footnote-14) of organisational activists.**

**His participation in the Recife workshop, his reflections on it, and his elaboration of other practical exercises featuring a shared resource base, practical activity, and the need for analytical thought, proved to be life-changing for Clodomir de Morais. Having been twice expelled from school as a child and once as an adolescent student activist, and having finally acquired a secondary certificate at an Adventist school combining work (at Ford Motors) and study, he had educated himself further by reading widely during his life as a journalist and underground activist; and most recently he had moved back to the North-east, set up his own news agency, studied law and joined the ranks of the urban professionals supporting the Peasant Leagues. After the Recife workshop he was no longer a participant in workshops, but an organizer of workshops. He worked closely not only with Francisco Juliao but also with the already well-known Paulo Freire.[[14]](#footnote-15) With the support of the Leagues he was elected to the state legislature of Pernambuco.**

**In the early 1960s de Morais staged workshops of an experimental character throughout the North-east of Brazil. Unlike Juliao, he devoted major energy not only to *precaristas,* but also to part time and full time agricultural labourers who had no claim whatever to land. The evolving workshop formats were based on the core insights that explained the unexpected result of the Recife workshop on agrarian reform law: a common pool of resources, activity, concrete situations requiring analytical thought. The workshops were cut short by the coup d’etat of 1964. De Morais was arrested and sentenced to two years imprisonment and ten years deprivation of his civil rights. Transferred from prison to prison, he was jailed for a time at the Olinda Prison near Recife where he shared a tiny cell with Freire. After his release in 1966 he managed to slip into the Chilean Embassy in Rio de Janeiro, where he was granted asylum by the South American nation that had for over a century promised to be “either the tomb of the free, or the refuge against oppression.” [[15]](#footnote-16) From Chile he was quickly hired, still in the same year (1966) to be the United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO) Agrarian Reform Regional Advisor for Central America. There he ran workshops in Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Mexico. Later in the same region under the auspices of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), he was able to extend Experimental Laboratories to Guatemala, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela.**

**In 1973-76 he applied the emerging method to peasants’ capacitation[[16]](#footnote-17) within the Agrarian Reform Program of Honduras, in collaboration with that country’s Government and the FAO. Over the three years 1973-76 more than 200 workshops took place in Honduras, with participation of more than 24,000 peasants, and government and NGO officers from around the region and indeed from around the world. Among those trained in Honduras was Ian Cherrett of the Dutch development agency Humanistisch Instituut voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerkung (HIVOS). Cherrett was later to facilitate linkage between African development activists and OW practitioners from Latin America. In 1986 he would become the first to direct an Organization Workshop in Africa.**

**The name used by de Morais for the Honduran workshops, “The Experimental Laboratory on the Formation of Organisers of Associative Enterprises” came to be shortened to “Organisational Laboratory.” This shortened form is still its name in Spanish (*Laboratorio Organizacional*)). By the beginning of 1978 he had organized workshops for several thousand participants in twelve countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. A common outcome of the workshops of the 1970s was that the participants organized self-managed enterprises. In some cases, like the agro-industrial complex Hondupalma in Honduras and Coopesilencio in Costa Rica dealing in palm oil, reforestation, cereals and ecotourism the enterprises were still going in 2000 and to the best of my knowledge are still going today.[[17]](#footnote-18)**

**But before 1978 was over the ILO called de Morais away to a test of fire. The test of fire was to apply his theory of organization in the much different context of post-revolution Portugal. From 1926 to 1974 Portugal and its colonies were ruled by a peculiar corporatist dictatorship little understood in the outside world. It was defined by the Estado Novo ideology of Antonio Salazar, who was the dictator for most of that period. A lawyer who had been Professor of Economic Policy at the University of Coimbra, Salazar claimed to be guided by Roman Catholic social doctrine. Three characteristics of his regime were autarky (industrialization by import substitution and generally keeping the Portuguese economy separate from the rest of the world), interventionism (extensive state participation in the economy, largely in collaboration with the small number of leading families who dominated it) and lusotropicalism (holding on to Mozambique and Angola especially, regarding them as provinces of Portugal and as necessary to make Portugal large enough to be viable). When a group of radical military officers overthrew the dictatorship on April 25, 1974, many observers thought it likely that Portugal would move from corporatism to communism. Instead Portugal moved from corporatism to a liberal form of capitalism; joining the European Economic Community, freeing markets from state intervention, dismantling the tariffs that had protected local industry from foreign competition. There ensued a result nobody had anticipated: Entrepreneurs, unable to compete in the world market Portugal had suddenly joined, and still nervous about the possibility that communism might be coming after all, left Portugal in droves. Their employees responded creatively to the departure of their employers by transforming the enterprises into worker-owned cooperatives. The employees became simultaneously the workers and also to the best of their ability the managers. Quickly learning management skills became an urgent necessity. Enter Clodomir de Morais. Prime Minister Mario Soares appealed for help from the ILO to train trainers, who would in turn train the thousands of new worker-owners who suddenly had to learn how to run cooperatives. The ILO transferred de Morais from Central America and put him in charge of a massive programme in Portugal. De Morais adapted his Organizational Laboratory method to the context of a training course for co-operative support personnel. In this context priority was given to organizing the channelling of operating funds to the recently reorganized worker-managed enterprises. In the two years 1978- 1979, some 3000 “Technicians in Economic Development” were formed, specialized in the identification and preparation of investment projects for the Portuguese co-operatives.**

**I omit the fascinating story of Organization Workshops in Latin America and Caribbean from 1980 to the present, in order to focus attention on Africa.[[18]](#footnote-19) However, before moving on to Africa, it is necessary to fill in two important points. The first is that for several decades now and still at the present time the OW has been adopted and adapted to be a methodology employed by the movement of landless workers in Brazil (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra, MST) in their remarkable projects taking over large tracts of unused land and turning it to agricultural production in a short period of time.[[19]](#footnote-20)**

**A second important point has already been mentioned but it needs to be briefly elaborated. It concerns the avuncular relationship of de Morais to the methodology born in the same region at the same time fathered by his friend Paulo Freire. De Morais added “organizational consciousness” to Freire’s more famous “critical consciousness.” Critical consciousness for Freire is human consciousness. Attaining it is humanisation.[[20]](#footnote-21) Humans, unlike other animals, are capable of thinking about their activity, transforming it, and together with other humans transforming the world.[[21]](#footnote-22) Much traditional education suffocates what is human about human beings. It is rigid, dogmatic, authoritarian, paternalistic, assistentialist[[22]](#footnote-23); it reduces humans to mere objects. Freirian pedagogy, in contrast, honours the human capacity for thinking. It is problem-posing, consciousness-awakening. It is a mobile process of mutual learning rooted in communication and dialogue. All involved become critically aware. But Moraisians point out that Freire stopped short of an “objective methodology.” Freire himself said that problem-posing dialogue implies a critical return to action. It starts from action and returns to it.[[23]](#footnote-24) But unlike his friend de Morais he did not deliver the means of production to the participants and leave them free to organize practical work. He did not create new conditions where the very problems that arise in the course of organizing and reorganizing to get real work accomplished would become authentic pedagogical instruments leading little by little to “organizational consciousness.”[[24]](#footnote-25)**

# The Organization Workshops Come to Africa

**Jacinta Correia (spouse and co-worker of Clodomir de Morais) has identified several versions of the Organization Workshop,[[25]](#footnote-26) including the centre workshop, designed to capacitate a cadre of leaders of membership organisations, co-operatives or agricultural enterprises; a course workshop, for organizers of systems of mass capacitation; a field workshop, to capacitate communities and their leaders on request; and an enterprise workshop, to enhance organisation and management in an already existing enterprise, often one in crisis. I will be concentrating on the form taken by many southern African OWs, classified by Ivan Labra in a lecture at Marsh Farm (2000) as constituting a specific “Southern African model” of OW. I would regard it as a mix between Correia’s “field workshop” and “enterprise workshop”. The most common southern African OW is a “field workshop” in the sense that it capacitates communities; at the present time it often capacitates communities of the chronically unemployed. It is an “enterprise workshop” because it enhances the performance of participants in the existing enterprises they are already part of and because it encourages the formation of new enterprises. It enhances learning in three milieux: (1) learning among the participants as they organize their PE (their Participants’ Enterprise), make mistakes, and then reorganize to correct their mistakes; (2) learning in the host community sponsoring the event, usually an NGO that ends up not only wiser but richer because the OW leaves it with a well, a building, a fence, or an orchard it did not have before; and (3) learning back home as participants use their newly acquired managerial skills in the previously existing enterprises they came from.**

**REWRITE TO SPEAK TO PRESENT DAY REALITIES**

**The name “Organization Workshop” now used in the English-speaking countries of southern Africa (although they are only partly English-speaking and the OW is often conducted partly or wholly in Shona, Afrikaans, Setswana, Zulu, or some other local language) was first coined on the Caribbean coast of Central America. De Morais’s method was introduced to the English speaking world in Belize (formerly British Honduras) in 1985, as the “Experimental Workshop in the Theory of Organisation (EWTO).” As its Spanish name had earlier been shortened to laboratorio organizacional, so it’s English name became shortened to Organisation Workshop (OW).**

**Ian Cherrett of the Dutch development agency Humanistisch Instituut voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerkung (HIVOS) – which funded exploration of OW potential in southern Africa for a decade - introduced the OW to southern Africa in 1986 by directing workshops at Rujeko farm in Zimbabwe, and later that year, in Serowe village in Botswana. HIVOS was founded in 1968, as an offshoot of the Dutch Humanist League founded in 1946. It was to be a humanist agency complementing the work of the several faith-based Dutch development agencies. Like the faith-based agencies, HIVOS is funded largely by the Dutch government, although it also raises private funds. It estimates its humanist ideology to be the ideology of about two million out of the approximately sixteen million people of Holland—an estimate that serves to legitimate public support proportionate to that given to church-related agencies like the Roman Catholic CEBEMO and the Protestant ICCO. [[26]](#footnote-27) It has approximately 160 employees, of whom 50 work outside Holland in regional offices in Harare, Zimbabwe; San Jose, Costa Rica; Jakarta, Indonesia; and Bangalore, India. On its website HIVOS declares its core values to be:**

**1. A focus on human values and the right of self-determination**

**2. An aversion to dogmatism and to totalitarian regimes.**

**3. An emphasis on pluralism and democracy**

**4. Placing mutual solidarity at the forefront and encouraging it in all situations.**

**5. Striving for responsible citizenship, and**

**6. Respect for cultural and social identity.**

**HIVOS slogan is “No limits to people.” [[27]](#footnote-28)**

**Born in the context of the struggles of the Peasant Leagues in Brazil, the Organization Workshop methodology from 1966 onward proved to be appropriate for pursuing the goals of the United Nations agencies ILO and FAO in Latin America and the Carribean. In 1973-76 the Government of Honduras made OW a key part of the process of implementing its agrarian reform. In 1978-79 the liberalizing government of Mario Soares in Portugal called on Clodomir de Morais to train specialists in the financing of cooperatives. In the late 1980s in English-speaking southern Africa the OW was introduced and sponsored by Dutch humanists.[[28]](#footnote-29)**

**In 1987 one of the Latin American proponents of the method, Ivan Labra from Chile who had worked with de Morais in Brazil and his wife Isabel Labra were invited to Botswana by an organization already familiar to the reader: CORDE, Co-operation for Research, Development and Education, a grassroots organization working mainly with the rural poor. Shortly thereafter the Labras accepted a contract, facilitated by HIVOS, to work at Glen Forest Training Centre in neighbouring Zimbabwe. The arrival of the Labras started a new phase of the methodological development of the Organization Workshops.[[29]](#footnote-30) Ivan and Isabel, together with colleagues in CORDE, SADET (South Africa Democracy Education Trust) and other development institutions devoted themselves to contextualizing the method to African realities. Over a period of ten years, 1987-1997, the Labras supported by HIVOS led the effort to elaborate and systematize the method until it was possible to embark on truly societal scale interventions. Indeed in just one series of OWs in Zimbabwe over three years, 3000 participants a year from fourteen villages built small dams so that they could engage in agriculture and animal husbandry.**

**MAYBE A BOX ON THE LABRAS WORK IN MOZAMBIQUE**

## Some Theoretical Points

**In order to facilitate easy discussion I will make my theoretical points (and in a following section some points about the practical setup) referring to the “field workshop” with “enterprise workshop” discussed above that is widely used in southern Africa. UPDATE**

**The Organisation Workshop is an experiential methodology that combines training in enterprise organisation with vocational training, usually around the creation of infrastructure or other productive activities. In the words of its pioneer, Clodomir Santos de Morais it is, “A practical exercise in the creation of a real enterprise. It seeks the acceleration of the evolution of ‘organisational consciousness’ through a planned acceleration of practice. The group as a whole reaches this organisational consciousness progressively through the analysis of the factors that support or obstruct the activities of the enterprise. The main elements are the people, (a minimum of 40 persons), the means of production, and total freedom to organize themselves the way they consider fit and to use all this to achieve self-reliance as a group”.[[30]](#footnote-31) The insights first derived from the Recife course –a shared resource base, practical activity, and the need for analytic thought—have been developed and deepened in various ways over the years and decades, but certain features have remained constant. In de Morais’ words again, the OW always allows, “…the participants operational control over the means and the very instruments that facilitate this capacitation process. These means may include office stationery, computers, typewriters, photocopiers, vehicles, kitchen installations, audio-visual instruments and installations of all kinds. Over these, the community exercises a true right of ownership or of temporary tenancy (usufruct). What we have here is a true case of real social ownership of all the means that facilitate the capacitation process.”[[31]](#footnote-32)**

**The workshop design –featuring possession of the means of production and freedom to organize—is able to engage all participants in critiquing organisational perspectives and methods. It engages ordinary people (including often people with low levels of literacy) in reflection at what can be called a metatheoretical level, that is to say at a level that questions the framework of their own previous thinking. It allows them to adjust their own organisation in accordance with their experience and in accordance with the analytic thought stimulated by their experience.**

**As its name suggests the OW has as its central focus learning about organisation. If one starts with the Druckerian premise that modern society is a society of organisations, it follows that people who have not learned to function in organisations are necessarily excluded from modern society. The inclusion of the excluded, insofar as their exclusion is caused by their inability to make a culture shift from pre-modernity to modernity, must necessarily be done through something like an OW – if not specifically by an OW in the tradition pioneered by Clodomir de Morais, then by some other learning process with similar aims and able to achieve similar results. Jacinta Correia has written about the participants in the OW process and about how they learn: “Being in firm control of the instruments of the capacitation process in which they are the principal actors, they successfully achieve an analysis of their own life conditions, the origins of which they have now learned to understand in a critical manner. This experience will restore their self-confidence at the same time as they develop new and vital capabilities that permit them to succeed in the capitalist market economy in which, hitherto, they found it so difficult even to survive.”[[32]](#footnote-33)**

**It is important to underline Correia’s point that the participants “are the principal actors.” Writing in the context of agrarian reform projects de Morais emphasized this point in a manner that can be generalized to other contexts as well: “When setting up an enterprise with social participation in a rural context, it is obvious that the way this enterprise is managed will be social in nature, too. By this we mean that the primary as well as the secondary organisational structures that underpin the enterprise, and will allow the rural economy to develop, will have to be generated from the inside out, from inside the lived reality of the producers, and not from the outside in, as commonly happens with “blueprint’ or ‘desktop’ planning.” [[33]](#footnote-34)**

**The Theory of Organization founded by de Morais emerges within the realm of social development, and specifically in efforts to build work enterprises by those excluded from the mainstream economy. Just as in the case of business theory, it is therefore interested in increased effectiveness, productivity, and efficiency. However, throughout its formative years there has been little or no exchange with business theory, and little or no exchange with the management sub-field of organizational development (OD). OD has been growing up during the same years OW has been growing up; they are like two twins separated at birth who have never met. The twin who belongs to management science, OD, has grown at a startling pace in the decades since its birth in the 1960s. It has expanded from its origins in business theory to embrace the public and not-for-profit sectors. In the latter, in a not-for-profit social development organisation like CORDE in Botswana, OD meets OW. The kinship of OD and OW is immediately apparent when they meet because it turns out that both are about creating learning organisations.**

**Here Clodomir de Morais and management science speak to each other. Their conversation outlines the general form of management science I am proposing to call “unbounded organisation.” It is a conversation about learning.**

**Learning in the Enterprise of the Participants**

**The effect of having the vast majority of enterprise members critically appraising their own organization with the aim of improving it is that Organization Development (OD) proceeds at a rapid pace within the enterprise created by the Organization Workshop (OW) participants. In all workshops in southern Africa over the last twenty years there were dramatic shifts in management structure, style and method over a period of four weeks. This point can be illustrated by looking at a typical pattern found in four Organization Workshops in Botswana in the 1980s. The Serowe workshop saw three distinct phases of organization, and this pattern was later repeated in Otse, Zutshwa, and at Akanani in the nearby northern province of South Africa bordering Botswana. This three phase pattern illustrates how a strength of the OW method is that there is an acceleration of the organizational change process. These three phases could potentially take four years rather than four weeks in everyday life.**

**Phase one: The initial management team was elected from the general assembly of the enterprise. It comprised the most learned participants, and therefore those most confident in discussion, and thus apparently best qualified to lead the enterprise. The most articulate of these people became the recognized leaders of the whole enterprise at its inception. As participants experienced the consequences of weakness of this team and realized that they had the power to change it, the first adjustments started. In the Serowe OW the first to go was the Treasurer, who was found to have stolen some money; he was expelled from the workshop and sent home in disgrace. The participants replaced individual members found wanting with candidates who had demonstrated ability or leadership in a particular work process, or who were more articulate in critiquing the initial management. At this stage management and leadership tended to be seen as the same thing. Management failures were taken as signs of individual weakness of the leaders. The solution appeared to be to replace one charismatic leader by another, and so on successively.**

**The cycles of reliance upon charismatic people, followed by disdain for and anger at them, became shorter and shorter.**

**Phase two: Midway through the OW, the learning sessions on the Theory of Organization, using de Morais’ Notes to a Theory of Organization to be discussed in the following chapter, brought realization that failures of management were linked to the very fact of its election from the general assembly. It became understood that effective management required systemic alignment of the various work thrusts (involving planning, resourcing, and reflecting on activity) and hence strong links between those tasked with the activities and the coordinating team. This insight precipitated a complete change in the structure and style of management.**

**Phase three: Another transformation began. Within days a system was instituted in which there was devolution of detailed management to each unit but coordination of work across the enterprise. This brought a dramatic improvement of management, a dramatic improvement in the productivity of the enterprise, and a dramatic improvement in the pace of individual learning. These shifts were accompanied by a surge of energy and commitment. New faces appeared in management, people whose abilities were different from those of the orators at the mass meeting.**

**The regular practice of critical reflection encouraged by the Theory they were learning in the lectures then provided stimuli for further adjustment to the organizing patterns. Improvements are steadily implemented as the OW progresses.[[34]](#footnote-35)**

**By the end of four weeks the productivity of the enterprise of well over a hundred people was well over the average for the country. There were also a vibrant crèche, ongoing literacy and numeracy classes, an efficient kitchen with a changing daily menu, and a team engrossed in the production of a report summarizing the learning of the four weeks. The last week was a far cry from the anomie of the first week, characterized by long discussions and groups of people waiting to hear what they should do.**

**Learning in the Hosting NGO**

**Since the OW is meant to foster learning about organisation it is hardly surprising that organizational change occurs in the enterprise formed by the participants. What is perhaps more surprising is that there is immediately also an effect on the organization that arranges the OW, in southern Africa usually an NGO. For example, the emergence of previously unrecognized leadership has been a feature of all NGOs in southern Africa. At Otse a young woman who previously had no leadership experience outside her family emerged as the formidable and astute coordinator of a complex enterprise. In Zutshwa experience identified the most capable individuals as the ones to continue after the OW as the workers in charge of running the salt-works that the OW constructed for the hosting NGO. A receptionist in another hosting OW was so changed by her work experience that within months she was nominated to lead a southern African network, a task that she performed with distinction. An unassertive and quiet member of another NGO was asked to take up the post of director based on his initiative and organizational confidence displayed in the months after an OW he helped to host.**

**Of course the workshop praxis may and sometimes does reveal weakness in existing leadership; it is after all a real-life situation.**

**Organizational change in NGOs participating in OWs is, however, more than effects on individuals such as those just described. It comes from the whole organization critically assessing its practice and culture. A feature of the Moraisian practices learned at the workshop is that criticism is institutionalized in a non-threatening way, or at least in a relatively non-threatening way. A strength of Moraisian theory is that it is able to interpret counter-productive behaviour and to show its roots. It is able to suggest ways to deal with it. Following up on activities with a critical balance of what went right and what went wrong becomes a routine. (There will be more on the critical balance in the next chapter.) This means that criticism of the counter-productive behaviour is not personally threatening. It is easier for individuals to change. Criticism becomes a strengthening exercise for all concerned; indeed there is often a great deal of fun as participants caricature behaviour patterns that are unhelpful to the enterprise.**

**A Moraisian workshop also provides an occasion for an NGO to revisit the decades-old debates about the place of an NGO in an “aid chain,” to discuss once again the positions taken by the “intermediaries,” the development intelligentsia and the development elite. The relationship of NGO workers to grassroots organizations is central to any struggle for social development, and interactions that raise to consciousness the problematic nature of that relationship, specify what is a desirable orientation, and show what needs to shift, are profoundly helpful. Such interactions about in an OW. For example, it sometimes happens that staff members of the hosting NGO are elected to the initial management committee in Phase One described above. They are then caught in the Phase Two and Phase Three conflagrations where the initial leadership is first personally discredited and then systemically replaced, and in the process often branded “corrupt intellectuals” or something worse.**

**It is not surprising that OWs contributed to a significant culture shift in favour of grassroots involvement in NGO governance in two of the organizations that employed its methodology in its early years in southern Africa.**

**There are yet other ways in which the OW stimulates learning in the organization hosting it. Exposure to the OW may bring about a shift in perspective about what is feasible when large numbers of people work together. The hosting NGO is sometimes energized by the social mobilization that occurs as a result of an OW, for example the mobilization in Zutshwa around securing land and promoting agricultural development for the indigenous San hunter-gatherers. The very scale of preparations for the workshop tends to align for a common cause the local private and public agencies of the town or village where the OW is to take place. As the accelerating learning in the OW shines a spotlight on the faults of the Participants Enterprise, it also shines a spotlight on corresponding faults in the hosting NGO. It shows ways to correct the faults.**

**The combination of all these effects may generate a great change. In the case of CORDE in Botswana the organizational activity of that host NGO increased ten-fold in the space of a few months.**

**Learning in the Participants’ Enterprises of Origin**

**Transmission of the learning about organization to the existing enterprises the participants came from depends mainly on how much they are able to influence their home enterprises on their return. This means there is a greater chance of multiplying OW learning when not one but several from the same organization attend, so they can form a core group supporting each other back home. Experience has shown that there can be rapid changes in the home enterprise when that happens. The returning participants tend to view their home enterprises through new lenses. What formerly appeared to be daunting and beyond them, can now appear to be a simple problem they know how to solve because they have solved it before. They can imagine improving their home enterprises by applying principles suggested by the theory of organization learned and practiced in the OW. For instance (to give a small example –many more will be given in the next chapter) they can apply the principle that one should prepare for a meeting in advance, and not just show up unprepared.**

**Perhaps the most dramatic example of the effect of OW participation on a home enterprise was a negative one, one where the home enterprise was found so wanting that it was completely reorganized. Among the participants in the Otse OW were several South Africans representing an unemployed workers association. Their attendance was sponsored by COSATU (Council of South African Trade Unions). Their behaviour was so irresponsible and outrageous that they were seen by the other participants as a discredit to the strong union movement (COSATU) that had supported their association over the years. The leaders of the unemployed workers delegation in fact decamped from Otse to Gaborone (the capital of Botswana) when it became clear that work was to happen in the “workshop” not merely talk, as occurs commonly in what are known as “workshops”. In that city they enjoyed a week of partying and loud talk about their role in the liberation struggle (this was during the time of Apartheid). They told some journalists that they had come to see the ANC (the African National Congress whose leader Nelson Mandela was then in prison, which was then still illegal in South Africa and operating clandestinely in Botswana because the Botswana government was intimidated by the South African government). The Botswana security police raided CORDE’s offices as a result of these incidents. It was only the fact that CORDE was able to produce a letter showing that it had invited the Botswana Defence Force to the OW that reassured the raiding officers that CORDE was not a front for the liberation movements.[[35]](#footnote-36)**

**Discussion in the OW of the unruly behaviour of the delegation from the South African unemployed workers association led to agreement that the real problem was the style of leadership of the organization, where a system of “patronage politics” had become entrenched. The host NGO according wrote a letter to the general secretary of COSATU, who immediately ordered an investigation. Barely two months after the Organization Workshop a review of the unemployed workers association began that led to sweeping changes and new leadership.**

## A Note on the Practical Setup of an OW

**Two separate and interacting organisations are required for an OW: the Facilitators’ Enterprise (FE) and the Participants’ Enterprise (PE). The FE “is the organisational framework set up for all organisational and training activities before, during and after the Workshop… It is created before the design of the workshop and remains in place after the workshop”.[[36]](#footnote-37) The first task given the participants in any workshop is to set up an Enterprise of the Participants (the PE) with which the FE will interact. Work is organized by the enterprise of the participants after negotiation of a contract with a technical team in the Facilitators’ Enterprise, and is paid at market rates for the relevant jobs. In addition to the eight-hour working day, participants are obliged to attend daily lectures on the Theory of Organisation. These take place over a period of some two weeks, and are designed to enable participants to gain perspective on their social context and patterns/models of organisation, stimulate changes within the enterprise of the participants and provide tools for enterprise self-management. The OW creates the environment (and a thirst for learning amongst participants, as will be discussed below) for skills development in several areas: practical enterprise organisation skills – including labour and money records and control, tendering and quoting for work, work planning – vocational skills (such as building and welding), literacy and numeracy development as well as non-production related skills in areas as diverse as catering, child care and cultural activities.**

**Along with the organizational skills the participants will be acquiring vocational training, according to the nature of the practical work done; and this will require vocational training personnel, who will themselves need to learn something of OW philosophy in order to be able to do their jobs in harmony with the OW’s overall goals. The vocational training personnel may be as at Serowe skilled participants able to act as trainers in ferro-cement technology, or as at Otse building instructors from vocational training institutes, or as at Zutshwa a salt-works expert brought from the USA.**

**With respect to the non-production (and unpaid) work, a part of the workshop design is that participants should cook for themselves. The Facilitators’ Enterprise arranges cooking for the first three or four days, and after that the responsibility for catering passes entirely to the participants. The participants also have to arrange childcare for the children who come to the workshop with their parents, arrange security for the enterprise assets and make adequate arrangements for health care of participants.**

**The workshop lasts four weeks, although in some cases a longer time has been allocated (up to six weeks), in order to accomplish the work around which the OW was organized and to ensure that there is adequate time for participants to test and refine organisational structures and procedures. Experience in southern Africa suggests that the minimum number of participants is around ninety people[[37]](#footnote-38) – more than the number originally suggested by de Morais – while there is an upper limit of several hundred people. This high number of participants, compared with current practice in development education where thirty people is usually considered a desirable upper limit,[[38]](#footnote-39) is in part to ensure optimal conditions (or pressure!) for learning about organisation; it is a rather simpler task to organize thirty people when tools and equipment are available than it is to maintain engagement of a hundred people in meaningful work. In Organisation Workshops in Brazil that were used for provision of water reticulation and sewage disposal systems, more than a thousand people from the relevant communities were involved.[[39]](#footnote-40)**

**The number of people who can participate is defined by the amount of labour required for all the productive activities which can be carried out at a particular site. The limiting factor in setting up an OW is thus normally the amount of resources available for tools, raw materials, accommodation (where participants are not staying at their homes), and payment for labour.**

1. Morton S. Baratz, “The Crisis in Brazil,” Social Research. Vol. 22 (1955) pp. 347-361. p. 354. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Ieda S. Wlarda, Howard J. Wiarda, “Revolution or Counter-Revolution in Brazil,” The Massachussets Review. Vol. 8 (1967) pp. 149-165. p. 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Gilberto Freyre, The Mansions and the Shanties: the Making of Modern Brazil. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1963. For photographs of a *casa grande* in the North East and its accompanying row houses for labourers see Wendy Wolford, “Of Land and Labour: Agrarian Reform on the Sugarcane Planations of North-east Brazil,” Latin American Perspectives Vol. Vol. 31 (2004) pp. 147-170. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. This section on the early history and development of the methodology draws deeply on the work of Isabel and Iván Labra (1997-1999) and R. Carmen and M. Sobrado’s recent book (2000). Although the Labras state – referencing a talk given by the author of the method, Clodomir S. de Morais - that the idea of the OW was born in 1954, a reading of de Morais’ written recollections of that time (Moraes 1970:465) and the history provided by G. Huizer (1973: 84) suggests that the date is more likely to be 1955, when the *Sociedade Agricola de Plantadores e Pecuaristas de Pernambuco* was formed. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Shepard Forman, “Disunity and Discontent: a study of peasant political movements in Brazil,” Journal of Latin American Studies. Vol. 3 (1971) pp. 3-24. p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Clodomir Moraes , “Peasant Leagues in Brazil, “ in Rodolfo Stavenhagen (ed.) Agrarian Problems and Peasant Movements in Latin America. New York: Anchor Books, 1970. pp. 453-501. p. 465. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Sharecroppers, tenant farmers and squatters or any other individual working the land under a *precarious***,** unstable, marginal arrangement of land tenure, which gave them no social or economic security. Clodomir Moraes, “Peasant Leagues in Brazil,” in Rodolfo Stavenhagen (ed) Agrarian Problems and Peasant Movements in Latin America. Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1970. pp. 453-501. p, 467. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Ibid p. 469.. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Cited by Jacinta Correia in her contribution to Raff Carmen and Miguel Sobrado op. cit. p.48.. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Miguel Sobrado in Raff Carmen and Miguel Sobrado (eds) A Future for the Excluded. London: Zed Books, 2000. pp. 14-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Miguel Sobrado in Raff Carmen and Miguel Sobrado op cit. p. 15. Morais later attributed this insight about the key role of a common pool of resources to Karl Kautsky. Whether he read Kautsky first or discovered the idea in practice first is not clear. Clodomir de Morais, “The Large Group Capacitation Method and Social Participation: Theoretical Considerations,” in Carmen and Sobrado op. cit. pp. 26-38. p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. In later years Ivan Labra would elaborate this assertion, suggesting at a DRC Seminar (February 1997) that a shift in cognitive activity of participants, so that there can be an active search for knowledge, depends on the practice of *analytico-synthetical thought:* “analysis into components/elements and then re-synthesis into a new/different whole”. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Later we will devote some space to precise definitions of words like “formation”, training, instruction and capacitation. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Although Freire did not write The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, the book that made him world-famous until 1969 when he was in exile in Chile, he was already in 1946 director of the Department of Education of the state of Pernambuco, in 1961 director of university extension for the University of Recife, and from 1962 until the 1964 coup d etat organizer of a nationwide network of culture circles sponsored by the government of then President Joao Goulart. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. These are the closing lines of the Chilean National Anthem (*o la tumba será de los libres, o el refugio contra la oppression*) ironic in the light of Chile’s long military dictatorship of 1973-1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Raff Carmen and Miguel Sobrado in their joint work previously cited have paid a lot of attention to the concept and process of capacitation . I will discuss it further in the following chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Carmen and Sobrado op. cit. p. 56, p. 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. For that story see chapters 5 through 9 of Carmen and Sobrado op. cit. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. See chapter 19 of Carmen and Sobrado op. cit. especially p. 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Freire begins Chapter One of his Pedagogy of the Oppressed by identifying “dehumanization” as an historical reality of the times we live in and “humanization” as the object of his methodology. Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York, Continuum, 2005. (First Portuguese edition 1970) pp. 43 ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Paulo Freire, Education for Critical Consciousness. London: Sheed and Ward, 1974. p. 144 and *passim.* [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. “Assistentialist” is a neologism in English employed in the Carmen and Sobrado volume. It translates in an adjective form the Spanish and Portuguese substantive *asistencialismo.*  Its meaning is that people are assisted by social workers (*asistentes sociales*) and others rather than being empowered (or better “own-powered”). It also connotes superficial bandaid solutions that do not address the need for deep structural change. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Freire op. cit. p. 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. This paragraph summarizes Jacinta Correia’s first contribution to the Carmen and Sobrado volume “From Paulo Freire to Clodomir Santos de Morais.” She reports that less than two months before his death when Freire was a house guest of Morais and Correia, after watching videos of Organization Workshops Freire exclaimed, “No doubt: that is the way to go about it!” Carmen and Sobrado op. cit p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. See Jacinta Correia’s second contribution to the Carmen and Sobrado volume, “The OW and Civil Society in Brazil” pp. 193-203. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. “Very many facets of Dutch civil and political life are divided along Protestant, Catholic and secular lines. This is the case with schools, trade unions, television, and radio broadcasting. The consequent division of political parties along such lines allows a natural affinity between these parties and the four co-financing NGOs,: CEBEMO (Catholic), ICCO (Protestant), NOVIB (secular), and HIVOS (humanist.” James Fowler, “Building Partnerships between Northern and Southern NGOs,” Development in Practice Vol. 1 (1991) pp. 5-18. p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. For more on HIVOS see its website [www.hivos.nl](http://www.hivos.nl); [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. I omit discussion of the introduction of OW in Angola and Mozambique from 1987 onwards. These are discussed in chapters ten and eleven of Carmen and Sobrado op. cit. An interesting feature of the first Angola workshops was that creating employment was not an issue since the post-independence revolutionary government there had already guaranteed employment for all. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. *WORKTEAM* magazine reported on some of the seminal experiences over the first five years of the OW’s use in southern Africa. Learning from this experience has also been documented by Labra and Labra, as well as Andersson; some of this work appears in the edited volume by Raff Carmen and Miguel Sobrado that I have often cited. . This book is the most accessible English resource on the OW. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Translated originally by Ian Cherrett, as were the notes on de Morais’ Theory of Organisation. This quote – used by Ivan. Labra – comes from John Wilson’s diary about the 1995 Munguine workshop. (italics added). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Clodomir de Morais in Carmen y Sobrado op. cit. p. 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Jacinta Correia, in Carmen and Sobrado op. cit. p. 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Clodomir de Morais in Carmen and Sobrado op. cit. p. 29. Morais’ “inside out” language echoes the *Lebenswelt* (lived-world) phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl, from which his friend Paulo Freire drew such key ideas as themes in the life-world, the background for Freire’s key technique of “codification of the thematic universe.” Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Continuum, 2005. pp. 81-83, 121. I believe the pagination is the same in other editions of this oft-published book. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. This institutionalization of continuous improvement can be compared to the Total Quality Management or TQM of business theory that will be mentioned again in Chapter VI below. “Total quality management and business excellence is the culture of an organization committed to customer satisfaction through continuous improvement.” Gopal Kanji. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Interview S.Sekate (November 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Isabel and Ivan Labra, Organizational Workshop: an Overview. Harare: PELUM and Communications Link Trust, 1996. p. 9. The Labras note that de Morais originally called this the Primary Structure; the concept of the FE (sometimes called Trainers’ Enterprise) was developed in the southern African contexts. Indeed, when the method originally came from Latin America, those using it were in the habit of organizing around a single Director (See WORKTEAM magazine #1 and #2). This is attributed partly to de Morais’ role in single-handedly developing the method, and partly to the cultural context of Latin America with a greater acceptance amongst the peasantry for the figure of the “caudillo” a charismatic, macho little boss (Interview with Ian Cherrett, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Interview with Ivan Labra (October 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Marvin Weisbord and collaborators embarked on Large Group Interventions early in the 1990s, but these (very valuable) methods resort in the final analysis to “creating enough small group structures within the larger frame to allow a sense of identity to develop” (Bunker and Alban 1992b: 582) and thus obviate the need to deal with large group social psychology. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Records from IATTERMUND – Institute for Technical Support to Third World Countries; interview Labra (October 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)