

Refining Systematics

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Will you bear with me if I try to clear up some points that came up during the morning lecture and also in some of the conversations that we had since then on **The Systematics of Organization?**

What are we fundamentally concerned with in Systematics? There is cognition, knowing, observing, measuring, collecting, and generalizing, and the rest of it. If they are looked at as a cognitive mode, we see that they are always accompanied to some extent by judgment. That is to say, in practice we never have absolutely pure cognitions and no judgment. Even if I simply become aware that there is a glass on this table, there is already something or other from my previous experience of glasses and articles of furniture that interprets my sense experience, so that what seems a perfectly simple cognition of the presence of a glass on the table has something in it that is also an act of judgment that "This is a glass on the table." Therefore, one cannot actually divide one's investigation processes into two quite separate, mutually closed categories of cognitions and judgments. When one tries to do that, one goes back to some of the mistakes, for example, that were made in Kant's distinction between pure reason and judgment, and which people have been trying for two hundred years to rectify.

Although there is always an element of judgment in every cognitive act, and an element of cognition in every judgment, it is quite clear that the balance between the two varies enormously. There are some cases where the cognitive element is really so secondary that the judgment is in fact the all-important thing, and in others, the reverse.

In any application of Systematics to practical problems, there will have to be cognitions, there will have to be observations, measurements, and the rest of it, but my claim is that Systematics is essentially a technique of judgment and not a technique of cognition. It is at every stage a matter of decision. Judgment and decision-making are hardly separable for this purpose.

Setting Up the Monad

When we are setting up the monad, this is not even primarily a cognitive act. It is not like knowing what the organization is, walking round its boundaries, and simply saying, "This wall separates the organization from the non-organization." It is nothing like this. It is making decisions or acts of judgment of just how far this organization is totally involved and where we can say that the rest is external to it.

This is far more an act of judgment than it is an act of cognition. So that even when we start deciding on the problem that we take as a wholeness of investigation, we are going to delimit. It will be an act of judgment as to just what we are going to include and what we are going to exclude. When we have made this decision, the relatively simple part is to enumerate what is going to be contained within this wholeness. This is an extremely good example of the dominating part that judgment plays as against cognition, simply in selecting this wholeness. Are we going to look at this wholeness just in terms of the organization with which we are immediately associated, or are we going to look at it in a wider context? If so, where is the boundary going to be drawn? How far are the social and market connections of the organization going to be taken into it?

Also, there is a decision that involves cognition, involves knowing about the field. You may have to know a great deal about an industrial complex before you can decide just what you are going to take into your field of study. But when you have got this knowledge, you've still got three steps to make: that is, not only in determining your boundaries but also how far in detail you have to go, and not only how things stand now but how they will stand at various stages of maturity. You are going to have to take judgment decisions, and one part of the discipline of Systematics is that it requires that these decisions should be taken. If you have grasped the significance of a monad, you understand that this property of wholeness is not nearly so obvious and simple.

You have to have a certain appreciation of scale and magnitude and make judgments in terms of this, of what is relevant and what is not relevant. There is always a tendency to [specify the monad] without having gone through the actual discipline of asking questions like: "Where are we going to draw the external boundaries? How deep are we going to penetrate? How far are we going to take into account social, governmental, and other factors that are out of our control and that are yet intimately concerned with our undertaking? What is the actual time-span within which our study is going to be relevant?"

Dyads and Polarities

All these things have to be done, and every one of them is primarily an act of judgment. When you have done that, you are then faced with the fact that there are probably twenty or thirty relevant and interesting ways in which an organization is polarized. There are all sorts of polarizations. You have to decide which polarizations are relevant to your wholeness, how far the stratification that this introduces is to be taken into account, and how you are going to deal with this property, this kind of field, as a result of interference between different polarities. You do not have a simple linear hierarchy but always a kind of unique spread.

This interaction between the polarities in an organization, and deciding just which you will take into account and which you won't, what is really relevant for seeing the "force fields" in this organization, is again primarily an act of judgment. It is far more an act of judgment than one of cognition. And it is the kind of thing that is not often done unless something hits you between the eyes. You see that you are up against a direct problem of the delegation of responsibility, and decentralization, or something of this sort. Therefore, you say, we have clearly got to take this polar field of responsibility into account, and you think that you have really come to grips with the problems. But, how do you know that this field, this polarity that you think is so important, is not actually dominated by another one, for example, by some kind of instrumental dyad such as the kind of action to be taken by human beings and the kind of action that can be delegated to automatic processes? This instrumental polarity may have such an influence on the responsibility polarity that you must take it into account in studying the other. But it also may not. To say whether you are going to take it into account or not is not an act of cognition but an act of judgment.

The Triads and Strategies

I think it will be obvious without saying any more that when you come to recognizing the strategy situation in an organization, it is so elusive that this is not something that you will "know," that you will be able to say about it, "This is simply an ascertainable, observable fact." You have to do something more than that. You have to weigh the behaviour of different people, and different groups of people, who are influencing the operations of this organization, and see from that what kind of strategic picture is emerging. You are going to make use of a lot of observational material. You have to

talk to a number of people. You will have to check one set of views against another. This checking of one set of views is useless unless you make a judgment about it. Furthermore, the real judgment is the act by which you draw out of a whole lot of subjective impressions something objective, that is, the actual operational strategy present in this organization.

When I have tried to do this in specific cases, I have seen for myself how it calls for something in one, a kind of suspense of judgment, until one really sees that *that is what is really happening here*. They think something else is happening, but what is really happening is that the initiative is really *there*, and not where they thought it was. They are dominated by this, and not by that.

The way I have described it, it looks as if it is a cognition. In fact, it is not. It is a peculiar thing here. It is not an act of judgment in the sense that you make a decision that "I will include this and exclude that." It is more subtle when you have gotten to the triad. It is that the balance of factors, taking each one in turn upon the others, makes it certain that this is really what is happening here. After I have done that, I could begin to verify that if that is so, then this sort of trend will be emerging in this organization. It will be doing this kind of thing, and if I find that it is, then I have confirmed my judgment. That is not the same thing as saying that I have verified a fact.

The Tetrad

When we talk about the tetrad, we have to emphasize that there is a complete pitfall here for anyone who tries to treat it as if there are simply four boxes, each of which contains a set of data, for example, an inventory of resources, a schedule of tasks, an evaluation of the current position, and a formulation of goals. If you do that, you may or may not be doing something useful, but you are not doing Systematics, because Systematics requires that there be an act of judgment that will decide for you, for example, whether the ostensible goals that they are talking about are the goals that they really do set for themselves.

You can tell about the goals, the goals that are really motivational in this organization, by seeing how they link with the other factors. If the goals do not link with and influence intimately and profoundly each of the other three factors, then they are just "talk" goals. They are not real goals. They are not concrete. At the same time, in each case, this kind of judgment that is required for this tetrad analysis of an organization is so difficult that if you could see how difficult it was, I think you would throw the whole thing out of the window and say I won't have anything more to do with it.

You will find that this is extraordinarily hard, to be able really to pass judgment on four sets of terms, each of which is quite different in nature, not merely the sort of difference that you have between raw materials, equipment, and marketable products, or between research, production, sales, and financial personnel. It is very different from that.

You are comparing a state of affairs that is actual with a state of affairs that is possible, with a state of affairs that is potential, and with a state of affairs that is in action. The goals are not potential; they are merely something that is possible. Your resources contain potentialities. Your tasks are something in action, having a time element inseparable from them. These four things are different in nature. It is terribly hard for the human mind actually to think about four things as different as that.

If you think about goals, for example, as if they were something potentially inherent in the organization, then you begin to find that you have to keep chopping and changing, that you have to keep adjusting your goals. In reality, it is not like that, because the goals, if properly

conceived, should express what is *possible* for this organization. Out of what is theoretically *possible*, only some things will become *potential*, pregnant, and actually able to come about, and other things less so.

But I emphasize goals as this awareness of *possibility*, of what the situation can give. Given all sorts of completely unpredictable factors, this is the kind of thing that, properly speaking, constitutes a goal. You cannot say that a goal in this kind of sense—and I think this is the right sense in which the word “goal” should be used and therefore distinguished from the word “objective”—is a predetermined state of affairs that you are endeavouring to reach. A goal is a *possibility* that you are feeling out. But this possibility is absolutely essential. There must be a feeling of something to be realized, and this feeling must not be made too naively specific; otherwise, you have lost it as a goal factor and have turned it into simply a statement of objectives, and the statement of objectives is merely the connection between the goals and the tasks.

I feel that I have to warn you that when I come to try to apply the tetrad in concrete situations, I always give in and make it too much of just taking things as they are, of accepting formulae instead of reality.

Reality

This word “reality” is the word that I want to finish on in this lecture. Systematics is a search for the reality of the situation. The reality of the situation is not the facts. The facts can be converted into every sort of lie. You can interpret facts in any way that suits you according to other principles of interpretation, and, of course, the very same sheet of paper is black or white. There are various degrees of interpretation of facts that get away from this degree of subjectivity, but the search for it is, “What is the situation, *really*? What is *really* happening here? What does it portend for what we bring out of it, if we only set about it in the right way?”

When I talk about a “state of affairs,” for example, this is not just *what is there* but an *appreciation* of what is there. By that, I mean the *real* state of affairs, or the truth about it all. This linguistically sounds as if I were talking all the time about cognition, as if the truth is something that we know and perceive and that reality is something “knowable.” The peculiar thing about it is that it is not so. The *reality* of the situation is something we *commit ourselves* to through acts of decision and judgment. There is a certain acceptance involved in this, and even the outside investigator who comes to look at the situation has got to make this kind of act of commitment. When he is evaluating the situation, at a certain point he has got to say to himself, “This is what I am going to take as the reality from which I am going to work.” When he does that, he is making his act of judgment.

It is not that Systematics makes you think, which is very fine, but thinking is a very superficial process. What is required is *to decide* and *to judge*. This is the deep and committal thing, and unless at every stage you recognize that you have made a decision, you can take it that you have not applied Systematics techniques to it. When you recognize that you have made a decision, then you will see that something has coalesced, something has happened.