



## Chapter 2

# Clodomir Santos de Morais: *the origins of the Large Group Capacitation Theory and Method*

*by Miguel Sobrado*

### **Introduction**

Clodomir Santos de Morais was born the 30th of September 1928 in Santa Maria da Vitoria, a small rural town in the state of Bahía, in Brazil's Nordeste Province. He attended a public school and afterwards a private one in his town of birth. Because of his restless character he was expelled from both, which meant that technically he failed to finish his primary schooling. That is why his father sent him to go and live with a friend in the hope that he would learn the trade of tailor. He stuck it out for one year and a half in this occupation, but what he really had set his mind on was to emigrate to the big town, as most Nordeste youngsters had to do in the harsh years of the thirties great depression. So it was not long before he was off to São Paulo, where he completed his primary schooling while living with a member of his family there. Later he joined the Salesian College where he paid for his studies by working. The Salesian was a college with 603 students, most of whom children of Italian and German immigrants. He stood out there for being the only black student, which earned him the nickname 'the Flathead Nigger'. Expelled once more, this time from

college because of his student activism - (he was president of the governing board of the Student Union) -, he was accepted at an Adventist college. To finance his studies he enrolled at the Ford Motor Company where, after two years, he made it to line supervisor. It was when working at Ford in São Paulo that he got involved with organization of the trade union. He also got involved in work stoppages and strikes at a couple of other factories where he worked. Later on, while he was finishing his secondary studies, he worked part time as journalist at a Newspaper in São Paulo.

All these experiences served him well in his later life: he became journalist at a number of important newspapers in São Paulo and Pernambuco. He eventually was able to set up his own News Agency in Recife which allowed him to graduate as a lawyer in the same City. Journalism drew him almost inevitably towards politics. He was elected deputy for the State of Pernambuco, in which capacity he got closely involved with the Brazilian 'Peasant Leagues', then led by Francisco Julião. These and other activities earned him to be imprisoned for two years when the military took over in the Coup d'État of 1964. He 'did time' in several Brazilian prisons, one of them in Olinda, near Recife, where he shared the same (tiny) cell with lifelong friend and compatriot Paulo Freire<sup>1</sup>. His civil rights were taken from him for a period of 10 years, so, he managed to escape from prison and found asylum in the Chilean embassy in Rio de Janeiro, from where he moved to Chile.

This rich tapestry of experiences of this early period in his life which spanned from the occupation of tailor in his early youth, and passing through becoming musician on a jazz band and a symphonic orchestra with dozens of other musicians, the job of journalist where he came in daily contact with hundreds of ordinary workers and employees to his experiences as a factory worker and at the Ford Motor Company conveyor belt, in no small way contributed to the forging, later on in life, of his unique insights into the inadequacies of the peasant mode of production, his involvement in the peasant struggle for the reclamation of land, and his intimate knowledge of what makes the industrial 'worker' culture and associated mode of organizing so efficient and competitive. He came to the conclusion that it is the particular production culture of the peasantry, -- those '*artisans of the field*' -- by dint of reproducing itself indefinitely which puts them at a severe disadvantage when confronted with repressive mechanisms of all kinds.

In the fifties he became clandestine member of the communist movement<sup>2</sup>. It was in those early days that he underwent an experience which put an indelible stamp on the subsequent development of his method. This experience consisted of a seminar in

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<sup>1</sup> Just a few weeks before his death (2 May 1997) Freire, on a visit to Clodomir's Alma Mater at Rondônia Federal University, Freire gave a resounding testimony to his 'velho de guerra, amigo-imão', Clodomir (see: also Paulo Freire "*Aprendendo com a Propria historia*" Paz 1987:135 (see also ch 3)

<sup>2</sup> Movement, not Party. The Party was outlawed in Brazil until as late as 1989.

political economy in which he took part with 60 political activists in a small clandestine residential house in Recife. The cramped conditions of the house combined with the need for clandestinity so as not to arouse the suspicions of the police, -- which would have cost them dearly in the reigning political climate of those days --, imposed on the group a strict organizational discipline in terms of the division and synchronization of all the tasks which were needed for such an event, run in such a small space with so many participants, to run smoothly.

As he recounted it later, in approximately his own words: "*I learned nothing new about the theory, as it was a pretty elementary course for militants from different cultural backgrounds, but I learned an enormous lot in matters of organization; above all, how the existence of a commonly owned resource pool becomes a capacitating factor in the organization for popular movements*".

### **Years of exile and of further development of the Method**

After Chile he spent time in Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, Portugal and Nicaragua. In all these places he set up production and communal projects, especially in Honduras and Portugal. The latter are described more in detail in respectively chapters 6 and 13. In 1987 he moved to (the former GDR) where he was awarded his doctorate at the University of Rostock. From Rostock he made several visits to Angola and Mozambique, where he mounted and evaluated a number of massive capacitation projects, until his eventual return to Brazil in 1989, completing a total of 24 years in exile.

In the late sixties and in the seventies he worked as United Nations consultant in Central America, in a number of agrarian reform development projects, tirelessly promoting the cause of autonomous organization among the peasantry. It was through his active involvement in all these projects that both his theory and method, then still known as the '*Experimental Workshop on Theory of Organization*' (EWTO), became progressively more focused. de Moraes' '*Theory of Organization*' (Teoría de la Organización) is a unique interpretation of historical materialism, which embodies, again in a uniquely original fashion, a typology of social layering (referred to in his work as 'artisan', 'worker', 'semiworker' and 'social outcasts' ['lumpen']). The social behaviour and organizational capacities of each of these groups are determined by the nature of the work they are (or, in the case of the lumpen, are not) engaged in. It is the work-culture (work-experience) each of them which will dictate the need for establishing a close relationship between the composition of a group on the one hand and the particular way a development project ought to be organized with them, on the other. The same logic also underpins the way in which capacitation processes are formulated: as perfect as possible a 'fit' needs to be achieved between people's mental organizational models and the need for a social division of labor (which is integral part of de Moraes' *capacitation pedagogy*).

## **The Theory**

In de Morais' theoretical conceptualization, '*artisans*' (or: small producers) are those producers who are engaged in the entire, seamless production effort from beginning to end. Salaried 'Workers', on the other hand, typically 'earn their crust' by means of one or the other form of work which, unlike the artisan mode, involves a social division of labour; the same is true for 'semi-workers', although they get part of their income from working as artisans, too; whereas the '*lumpen*' or social outcast neither works nor seeks to work, regardless of the social stratum they originally hail from. To each of those strata corresponds a specific '*mental organizational structure*' or a corresponding organizational capacity which is a reflection of their daily activities and of their varying life experiences. Artisans and small producers, among whom the peasantry as the numerically largest and most important category, have been the social strata most negatively affected in the way industrial and technological development has massively displaced them all over the world. At the root of the peasantry's problems is the very nature of their artisan/small producer activities in which work is organized in the 'simple' (non-complex), self-sufficient fashion of the isolated worker operating their own or on a family basis. *The 'ideological structures of organization'* which are typical of the small producer -- however excellent in their own right and in a non-conflictual environment, become, in the words of de Morais, 'bad habits', 'deviations' or 'vices' when transferred to the totally different, ie complex social organization, with social division of labor and the specialization of the production process.

## **The Organization Workshop (OW) Method**

As the small producer (artisan) mode, according to de Morais, is destined to irrevocably disappear (not counting a few niche areas), as a significant way in which work and society are organized, the only way forward is for artisans and small producers, who have been displaced by the encroaching modernization and by 'Development' in general, to become '*entrepreneurially literate*' (become 'capacitated') in 'the other' mode of production and organization which will allow them to develop self-managing organizations based on the division of labor. These will allow them to survive as members of associative organizations provided, though, that they go through a capacitation (learning) process which, alone, will allow them to overcome the 'deviations' particular to the artisan mode and acquire a new '*organizational consciousness*'. Neither of these can be learned through conventional ways of knowledge and skills transmission ('training'). Such a capacitation and such a new consciousness requires that they become involved in a real-life practice.

This 'practice' can be generated in a process in which not less than 40 people (with no upper limit set in numbers) participate. One of the distinguishing features of the

'large' group - (as compared to the 'small' group) - workshop is that it imposes the need for a set of '*commonly pooled resources*' which imposes on the group the need to unite and organize<sup>3</sup>. This practice, to be genuinely capacitating, requires full autonomy of the group and lasts between 4 and 6 weeks. The process is moderated by a Director<sup>4</sup> who arranges the input, as local circumstances require, which will facilitate the capacitation process and the development of the participants' 'organizational consciousness'. This Method of capacitating and consciousness-altering learning was referred to by de Morais in the early years (sixties and seventies) as the '*Experimental Workshop on Theory of Organization*' (EWTO), while its effectiveness was still being tested and when progressive adjustments to the proceedings were still in the process of being made. It is only later that his approach came to be generally known under the present name of 'Organizational Workshop' (OW) (LO - Laboratorio Organizacional, in Spanish).

The OW is a practice in organizational capacitation which unleashes a prodigious amount of social synergy. And inside this practice 'the worker' will emerge as a new positive social value and force. Being 'worker' means to have learned to cooperate with others; to be modest ('know one's place' in the whole), but, at the same time, be disciplined and systematic in the planning and execution of the set tasks of the enterprise. Setbacks and failures in the way the organization, experienced on a daily basis, are usually attributable to the 'simple' (non-complex) and self-sufficient 'artisan' ways which are dysfunctional in the context of a complex organization, as well as to the 'opportunistic' artisan character and behavioral traits which will tend to subordinate the needs for proper planning and organization by the group, to their own immediate, shortsighted individual(istic) needs. Thus, in the context of the workshop as envisioned by de Morais, 'the artisan way' will soon acquire negative connotations due to the pettiness and self-centredness of the individualistic spirit which is typical here. 'Organizational vigilance' is therefore required to counteract and continue to overcome those artisan 'deviations'. The need for group vigilance is an important topic during the seminars in theory of organization which are run throughout the length of the workshop.

No texts expounding this method were known to exist until the *Bataán* OW in Costa Rica where a first systematization of the method, albeit limited, was carried out. This initial characterization and subdivision of the workshop process into different stages or phases was further complemented and nourished by actual practice by de Morais himself, especially during the important years he spent as program leader of the

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<sup>3</sup> Take away the 'commonly pooled resources'-element, and the group will disperse, with individuals working in isolation, relapsing into the small/micro entrepreneurial mode, which has been already identified as the (massive) problem, not the solution.

<sup>4</sup> For more details on 'The tasks of the OW director', see Carmen, Labra & Davis 'Learning from Brazil', Manchester Monographs 1999 & also chapter 11 in this book.

agrarian reforms in Honduras from 1973 - 1976. Here also the first foundation stones were laid for what, in later years, would become *the Job and Income Generation Programs* (PROGEIs) and *Systems* (SIPGEIs)<sup>5</sup>. de Moraes' involvement with the Agrarian Reform in Honduras, under the PROCCARA-INA-FAO programme (1973-76) resulted in the eventual establishment of over a thousand membership organizations there, all based on the application of the OW methodology in their initial stages, and while Honduras, where also the first cadres for the Costarican team were trained, can count among its achievements a strong Workteam, there were nevertheless no major advances of a theoretical or methodological nature during that period. The successes were due, rather and to a large extent to the remarkable intuition, experience and the great skill demonstrated by de Moraes and his work team in the management of situations. In other words, the 'technology' (ie the OW method) demonstrated, in actual practice, a degree of efficiency far in excess of the advances made at the theoretical level of or in terms of methodological formulation.

The drawback (of this lack of theoretical exploration of practice) is, of course, that success depends to a large extent on knowledge, personal skills and charisma which is difficult to verbalize and therefore difficult to reproduce. In his doctoral thesis, defended at the University of Rostock in 1987, de Moraes explores more in depth the epistemological foundations and other aspects of his method, which find resonances in Lenin and Marx, but also in the theories of Social Psychology of the Russian school -- (Vygotsky, Luria and Leont'ev) -- which were buried under Stalin (1930 -1958).<sup>6</sup>

In his thesis de Moraes advances the epistemological foundations of his theory, while at the same time throwing light on the methodological process. The most significant theoretical advance consisted in the incorporation in his theoretical framework A.N. Leont'ev's concept of *Objective Activity*' which came to replace the rather imprecise and ad-hoc conceptualizations he had soldiered on with until then. This allowed him to explain, in operational terms, what is actually happening in the relationship of the *subject* in the process of becoming capacitated with the aid of the *object*, ie the very object the subject wants to become adept ('capacitated') in managing. This newly acquired attribute allows the subject to make a key distinction between what it is to educate, on the one hand, and the process of capacitation, on the other. The epistemological foundations of the OW were thus further enriched with an operational base.

It was while working for UNDP/ILO in the INSCOOP program in Portugal (Institute of the Cooperative Sector) in 1978-9 that the first national PROGER (Job and Income Generation Program) was set up. This new approach was later perfected

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<sup>5</sup> see also chapter 14, 16 and 17 in this book.

<sup>6</sup> But were recently (re)discovered in the West, thanks to, among others, the work of Wertsch and Lave on 'Situated Cognition' (in a formal school context) and 'Situated Learning'.

when, in the late eighties, he was allowed to return to his home country Brazil where he founded *the Institute for Technical Support to Third World Countries* (IATTERMUND)<sup>7</sup>, with the support of the University of Brasilia. This became the launching pad for his work with the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) (*Movimento do Trabalhadores sem Terra*) who applied the Workshop with the support of the Workers Party (PT). Still later, as the successes obtained with the method in establishing concrete enterprises and organization with the Landless Movement, other Government and Non Government Organizations and Institutions became interested. The PROGERS were reproduced under different names all over Brazil, sometimes promoted by Federal Government, as eg in the case of *the National Program for Job and Income Generation in Poor Areas* (PRONAGER), in other cases by Federal State Governments as in the case of the SelfEmployment Programme (PAE) run with the assistance of FAO in São Paulo and surroundings<sup>8</sup>.

In each case de Moraes took great care to ensure that the PROGEI's did not -- apart from a short initial stage --, have to depend on Institutional support, but that they would become as soon as possible selfsustaining (autonomous) by turning themselves in a 'System', ie a (nationwide) '*System for the Identification of Job and Income Generating Projects*' (SIPGEI). For all practical purposes this meant that the creation of a popular institutional base belonging to civil society and independent from the political powers that be, rooted in autonomous people's enterprises, was always uppermost in his mind. Apart from some exceptions, this has not always been possible to achieve in the case of the PROGEI. In reality, the task is far from easy as the evolution from (local) PROGEI to (national) SIPGEI requires a root and branch reform of a nation's institutionalized services and the usual channels for the provision of credit which, from now on, need take account of the entrepreneurial initiatives and needs of those who are least favored in society. Which implies that they neither be excluded nor, at the other extreme, favors them with one-off special concessions with clientelist overtones whenever an electoral campaign appears on the horizon.

This also means that the investments made in them be related to those similar investments in the market and that the advances in organizational development



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See chapter 18 in this book (Walter Barelli)

(entrepreneurial literacy) of their enterprises be appreciated on their own merit, even if the totality of the benefits achieved may not be clear as yet. A sea-change in official attitudes and appreciation which dares to evaluate their future economic potential at its genuine market value and hold the advances they are making in organizational development (or: their burgeoning entrepreneurial literacy) as a genuine security set against the monies loaned out to them. The construction of PROGEIs has therefore been an important step forward in the application of the theory and method of Organization as proposed by de Moraes. This has made evident the great need for the formation of a new type of specialists who are capable of integrating their knowledge inside the development of the organization rather than what traditionally is expected from them, namely, the development of knowledge inside their own particular disciplines and specialisms. What we are talking about here is '*alley cat*' experts, capable of operating in the most adverse of circumstances, ie daring to put their faith in the organizational potential of the people themselves, rather than '*housecat*' type who are comfortably settled in their easy-going inertia and the ways of the traditional, institutionalised bureaucrat.

Last but not least, what we are in the presence of here is a revolutionary theory and method of capacitation which fundamentally challenges received ideas about training and which has shown, in its practical applications, the severe limitations under which traditional professional training disciplines labour in their attempts to come to grips with the problems of modern development. All of this poses a serious challenge to the academic community, but above all to the powers that be in their pursuit of effective designs by which to reform the state along more self-sustaining, lines than those prevailing at present.