PCMA

WORKING PAPER SERIES

ORGANIZING RETRIEVAL CONFERENCES:
ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS
OF KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT

by Mark A. Chesler
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**The Program on Conflict Management Alternatives
at The University of Michigan**

The Program on Conflict Management Alternatives

The Program on Conflict Management Alternatives was established in January, 1986 by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and additional funds from the University of Michigan. These basic grants were renewed in July, 1988 and again in July, 1991. The Program supports an agenda of research, application, and theory development. PCMA also establishes links among other university research and teaching efforts relevant to conflict management alternatives, and maintains liaison and collaboration with similar efforts in other Universities and Practitioner agencies. The Program staffers own work focuses explicitly on the relationship between social justice and social conflict, specifically: (a) the use of innovative settlement procedures and roles for disputants and third parties; (b) the institutionalization of innovative mechanisms and the adoption of organizational and community structures that permanently alter the way conflicts are managed; and (c) the fundamental differences and inequalities between parties that often create conflict and threaten its stable resolution.

We examine these issues primarily in United States' settings, in conflicts arising within and between families, organizations and communities, and between different racial, gender, and economic constituencies. These specific efforts are supported by a variety of research and action grants/contracts with governmental agencies, foundations, and private and public organizations/agencies.

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Organizing Retrieval Conferences:
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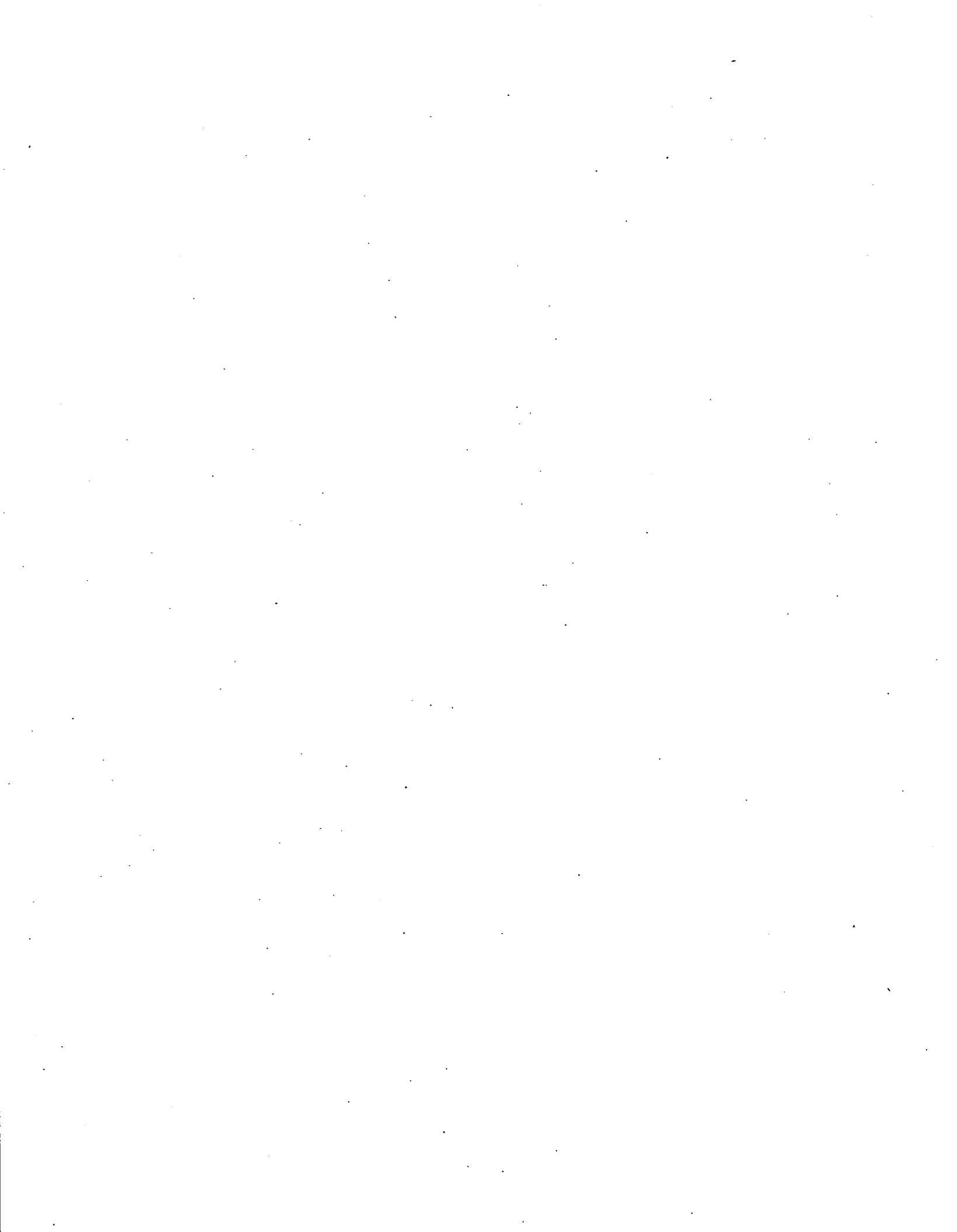
"Action is the final way to define a problem and validate a solution." -- Phillips (1986).

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade interest in models of conflict and conflict intervention has skyrocketed within the social sciences and the law. Considerable efforts have been made to disseminate insights from scholarly analysis and empirical research to the front-line stakeholders and the practitioner community. Too often, however, academic theories and research are only of limited interest and utility to the action oriented practitioner. The problem is analogous to that facing a person planning a cross country trip who, on turning to her travel club for assistance, is sent a geothermal map of the United States instead of a road map. It isn't that the map is inaccurate, but that its focus and level of explanation are inappropriate for the task at hand.

This is not surprising. Sociologists of knowledge have long been aware that a disjunction is almost inevitable between the precision of measurement and prediction required by traditional, positivist scientific models and the realities of actual complex life situations (e.g. Dubin, 1978). Deliberate

oversimplifications of phenomena, which make for better study and prediction within a controlled and abstracted realm, often cannot directly be translated or applied as effective techniques for understanding and solving practical problems in specific real world situations.

In this paper we describe our own and colleagues' experiences with one approach to bridging this gap between theory and practice -- the retrieval conference. Moreover, we examine this approach within the broader set of epistemological and practical issues raised by an action research orientation to social science and public practice.

POSITIVIST SCIENCE AND ACTION RESEARCH

Positivist science is a term commonly used to describe approaches to inquiry that consider scientific knowledge to be obtainable primarily from data that can be directly experienced under controlled conditions and verified by independent observers. Within this dominant academic tradition, scientists distance themselves from that which they observe in order to gain control and objectivity. Understanding usually is sought through experimental or statistical manipulation of the potential predictors or correlates of behavior. This tradition contrasts markedly with alternative approaches to knowing, such as phenomenological or participatory research, which propose that behavior is best understood contextually, by engaged participants who know the ends towards which the action is taken, who share

the same time frame and universe of moral concerns, and who are willing to generate or share their knowledge (Susman and Evered, 1978).*

One alternative approach to knowledge generation is action research. Action research attempts to develop a constant dialectic between research and action, with scientists often learning from action (or change) efforts in the field, as well as from formal research procedures. Knowledge is "tested" through social system change efforts, and constantly reformed on the basis of a series of exchanges with the external social and personal environment (Lewin, 1946; 1947).

Although all action research approaches seek to advance both the state of knowledge and the human condition, there are many variants. Some action researchers follow a linear strategy, moving from data gathering to research findings to application to reformulation to reapplication (Cunningham, 1976; Tichy and Friedman, 1983). Others reverse this sequence, preferring to begin with action efforts and move to deriving knowledge and research findings from these experiences (Elden, 1981; Fals-Borda, 1984). Still others favor a more cyclical or interactive

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*In contrasting these different social scientific traditions we seek to establish the context within which action research exists. No or very few scholars operate as "pure positivists", "pure phenomonologists" or pure anything else, and it is not our intention to stereotype approaches or make pejorative distinctions. Distinctive approaches do exist, however, and do influence knowledge generation processes, research findings, the social change potential of scientific inquiry, and of course, academic/public careers. Among the insightful commentators on these different traditions are Bernstein (1976), Fay (1975), Feyerabend (1988), Giddens (1974), Habermas (1973), Lincoln & Guba (1985).

approach, with action and research occurring simultaneously or in a constant feedback loop (Lewin, 1946; Peters & Robinson, 1984)

Some advocates of action-research operate quite closely or compatibly with the positivist paradigm and stay wedded to an academic research orientation, albeit with serious application and change goals (Cunningham, 1976; Shani & Passmore, 1985; Tichy & Friedman, 1983). Others, often described as participatory action-researchers, articulate an approach more focussed on grass-roots knowledge formulations and structural change in social systems (Bejason & Mustafa, 1982; Brown & Tandon, 1983; Carr & Kemmis, 1983; Elden, 1981; Fals-Borda, 1984; Gaventa, 1988; Hall, 1982; Lather, 1986; Mbilinyi et al; 1982; Tandon, 1981). Some of these variants are illustrated in the following diagram.

Scientist's roles

		Detached	Engaged
	Positivisism	(1) Traditional Research	(3) Action Research
Epistemological choices	Non-positivism Participatory	(2) Phenomenological Research	(4) Participatory Research

Box #1 reflects the most common and traditional approach to contemporary social scientific work, wherein scholars attempt to limit or control influences on them from the social environment and eschew direct engagement in applications of their knowledge-generation efforts. Some schools of phenomenology (Box #2), however interactive their research efforts may be with the social environment, likewise detach themselves from social action and

social change. Boxes #3 and #4 reflect the different epistemological choices made by action research advocates, both of whom adopt more socially engaged roles.

THE RETRIEVAL CONFERENCE AS AN ACTION RESEARCH ENDEAVOR

A retrieval conference is an attempt to gather or "retrieve" information and knowledge from people considered to be expert in the issues under inquiry. These experts may at times be scientists or researchers, with formal and systematic knowledge to be shared. At other times the relevant experts may be special groups of citizens, activists, practitioners or others embedded in and experiencing directly the phenomena under inquiry. Sometimes they may be both.

As prior discussion suggests, the rationale for such a collaborative data gathering and knowledge generating enterprise is drawn from different epistemological traditions than those which underlie positivist science. Aristotle's concept of "praxis," the art of acting upon the conditions one faces in order to change them, is seen as particularly appropriate to deal with "the disciplines and activities predominant in man's [sic] ethical and political life" (Bernstein, 1971, p.x). Concerned with avoiding the often sterile results of detachment, reductionism and abstraction, action-research emphasizes the value of developing an engaged and holistic understanding of an social system and using this understanding dialectically as a basis for interpreting the system's part (Habermas, 1973; Lather, 1986). Moreover, rather than assuming value neutrality in

methods of knowing, action research approaches assume that methods of knowing and human interests (the scientist's as well as others') are interwoven.

The philosopher Habermas pointed out that unless we reflect and act on the ends to be served by science, methods of prediction and control are likely to exclude improved understanding among persons and the release of human potential (in Susman & Evered, 1978, p. 585). Retrieval of the concerns and practices of citizens and social activists is a potential corrective to the misalliance that occurs too often between the academy study and the field -- between removed scientists and the people and institutions experiencing directly. As outlined by Lippitt and Schindler-Rainman (1981), "retrieval conferences" are designed to develop a relevant data base and theory building mechanism for academics and researchers, while serving as an educational tool and feedback device for practitioners or citizens themselves. The retrieval format assumes that participants have a sound basis of knowledge and practice. Further, it considers the theory/practice link to be at least reciprocal, more likely cyclical or interactive, and perhaps more effectively proceeding from practice to theory rather than the reverse. The format is straightforward: bring together skilled citizens, practitioners or activists who are willing to share their practical and experiential knowledge with each other and with academics. In such a context, Lippitt and Schindler-Rainman posit that the academics can clarify and derive the fundamental

principles or theories which undergird the practitioner's approach.

Our own conception of retrieval events departs somewhat from the Lippitt/Schindler-Rainman model and has been influenced by the educational programs of such social action agencies as the Highlander Research and Education Center, The Mid West Academy and ACORN, and exemplified in writings on dialectical pedagogy by Myles Horton and Paulo Friere (Friere, 1970, Bell, et al, 1991). In the Program on Conflict Management Alternatives at the University at Michigan, our major interest has not been simply to gather or understand the nature of practice, but also to affect linkages and interactions between front-line practitioners and applied theorists/researchers. To do this we challenge the typical hierarchy of knowledge bases, where the formal research or theories of scholars is considered of higher value than the practice or experienced-based wisdom of outstanding practitioners, and both are more cherished than the common-sense understanding of ordinary citizens and workers. In the retrieval conference, as we are developing the model, the academic is not limited to clarifying and deriving theories undergirding the practitioner's craft. Instead she and he fully share their own knowledge -- based upon their own thought and action -- on an even footing with practitioners.

Efforts to unearth and understand the consciousness of "ordinary" people, as well as the nascent theories of practitioners, complement attempts to demystify, de-abstract, and apply scholarly knowledge. In our view, such efforts lessen the

status and power barriers to open communication that typically

disempower non-scientists, and in so doing stand the best chance

of allowing new knowledge to emerge. Practioner-experts are

introduced to the "mysteries of science" as scientific-experts

are exposed to the "nitty gritty problems" that practitioners

face in their daily work. Collaborative consideration of the

academic expertise of scholars and the experiential expertise of

practitioners allows both science and public policy/practice to

be improved.

THE MODEL

The PCMA retrieval conference model utilizes several of the

major principles underlying participatory action research (P-A-R)

articulated by Israel, Schurman & House (1989):

> 1. It is a cooperative venture, defining issues of interest
> to community or agency activists in terms and language that
> concern them, and not proceeding solely from the academic
> generation of theoretically interesting problems (Brown &
> Kaplan, 1981; Elden, 1986; Kemmis, 1983). Moreover, its
> schedule and style of activities solicit and respect the
> contributions of academic theorists/researchers and
> community practitioners/members, and all contribute their
> relevant expertise (Kemmis, 1983; Peters & Robinson, 1984;
> Susman & Evered, 1978).
>
> 2. It is a co-learning venture, in which researchers and
> practitioners retrieve and articulate practitioners'
> concrete inventions and "local theory," and in which both
> also seek to understand the meaning and utility of academic
> findings. In light of both these inputs, participants seek
> to apply the new understanding developed out of this
> dialectic to both parties' work (Elden, 1986).
>
> 3. It is an empowering process in its own right, in which,
> through co-learning and interactive dialogue in the creation
> of new knowledge and new working relationships, all those
> involved gain increased knowledge and influence over their
> own lives and work (Elden, 1986).

On the other hand, our retrieval approach differs from this general P-A-R model in some important aspects.

    1. It is a research or knowledge-generation process that does not necessarily involve participants in immediate action for change.

    2. Although practitioners and activists generally are full participants in the actual co-generation of knowledge and exert influence on the agenda, the initiation of events rests with our staff of action researchers, and not with field workers & citizens.

In the past two years we (PCMA) have held three retrieval conferences. The first, In June 1988, focused on *GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND CONFLICT INTERVENTION*. The second, in November 1988, focused on *CHANGING ORGANIZATIONAL RACISM AND SEXISM*. And the third, in June 1989, focused on *MEANS OF EMPOWERMENT IN INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES*. Each of these events was designed to contribute to our understanding of the <u>relationship between</u> <u>research and theories of conflict and</u> <u>conflict intervention and conflict intervention practices related</u> <u>to social justice</u> <u>*objectives*</u> that were being utilized in the field. They also were designed to create working linkages between Program faculty and activists working on these issues in organizational and community settings. Each of these events was conducted somewhat differently along a variety of important dimensions: sponsor goals; the staff operating each event; the degree of preparation of participants; the criteria for "experts'" participation; the size and role of an audience; the co-learning modes utilized to enhance retrieval; the attention to internal group process among participants; and post-event interactions.

GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND CONFLICT INTERVENTION*

In the spring of 1988, the Conflict Clinic Inc. (CCI) at George Mason University and the Program on Conflict Management Alternatives (PCMA) at the University of Michigan decided to plan a joint meeting with grassroots community organizers. Our major concern was to understand the ways in which theory and practice of conflict intervention was and was not useful to local social change groups. Although both PCMA & CCI shared an interest in grassroots social change and conflict intervention, their goals and styles were not always the same. PCMA, a University-based research, development and action agency, explores 1st party and 3rd party advocacy and intervention roles with a focus on the links among social conflict, social justice and social change. CCI, a university-linked but independent agency, is deeply committed to a 3rd party mediation and intervention model and applies its approach across a wide range of public and private settings. These differences affected the retrieval process in ways that are illuminated below. While conference organizers' goals and styles need not be consensual, clarity about differences, and their implications, is crucial.

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* The following discussion draws heavily from the Conference Report: Cunningham et al., <u>Strategies for Social Justice: A Retrieval Conference Report on Grassroots Community Organizing and Conflict Intervention</u>. PCMA and CCI. Ann Arbor and Fairfax, 1990.

The Conference Design

In order to retrieve knowledge about the connections between grassroots organizing and conflict intervention, it was decided to recruit "expert grassroots organizers" who were known to be interested in conceptualizing their craft, and who would be responsive to a request to attend a conference to help share and generate this knowledge. In order to keep the event small, and to generate intimate conversation, it was decided to limit invitations to six people, in addition to our own staffs. Moreover, we agreed self-consciously to create a race and gender-mixed cadre. This demographic mix was elected in order to permit exploration of the roles such social categories might play in the organizing and conflict intervention process. The six community experts invited to attend, and the topics to be discussed, were selected after discussions with over 50 organizers and activists (see Appendix A). In the interest of ensuring selection of grassroots experts committed to an open sharing process and to joining theory and praxis, all external invitees were known personally to at least one member of the planning team.

The June 6-7, 1988, meeting was designed to explore the similarities and differences in approaches to conflict, conflict resolution, and social change employed by the six organizers and the ten conflict intervenors or faculty members from the two convening organizations. No other persons participated in this event - as presenters, discussants or audience -- another reflection of our desire to create an atmosphere promoting open and honest exchange.

The Questions ' Addreessed

Prior to the June event, each invited expert received a statement of the general purpose and design of a retrieval event, and materials indicating the primary concerns and questions as developed by the CCI and PCMA staffs:

1) As more public decision-makers seek negotiated agreements to determine community priorities and to resolve community disputes, community organizations will need to explore the utility of these processes.

> QUESTIONS: Are the concepts of negotiation and conflict resolution which permeate the public management field attractive and useful to grass-roots activists? What mix of confrontational and collaborative tactics, of organizing and agreement-making skills, work best in these situations? To what extent and how can grassroots campaigns/organizations make the best use of conflict resolution techniques to serve the goals of community empowerment and social justice?

2) The informal nature of negotiated conflict resolution means that there are no clear standards which require that questions of social justice be considered in these processes.

> QUESTION: Does the informal nature of negotiated conflict resolution affect the justice produced by the outcomes?

3) The "impartial" stance taken by many conflict resolution practitioners tends to remove them from direct involvement in the most pressing and difficult social issues of our day. The "advocacy" stance taken by other conflict resolution practitioners may exclude them from roles in negotiated agreements.

> QUESTIONS: Which of these stances (or what mix) is most useful to community organizations desiring assistance? How

are these skills and techniques learned or transferred? How can institutions like PCMA and CCI best work with community organizations to advance social justice and conflict resolution?

In addition to responding to these prepared questions, each invited expert, and some of the CCI and PCMA core staff members, was asked to prepare a presentation which illustrated their approach to these issues in conflict and social change. Case studies were to be presented in two major areas: (1) processes for organizing constituencies and handling conflicts, and (2) strategies for internal leadership and skill development and transfer. The questions participants were asked to address in constructing case studies included:

1. Organizing Constituencies, Building Campaigns and

    Handling Conflicts:

    - How did you decide which strategy(ies) to use?
    - What alternatives did you consider?
    - How did you know when to escalate the conflict, and when the time for an agreement was ripe?
    - What different roles were involved and were they carried out by the same person, e.g. conflict raiser, conflict escalator, agreement maker? And why?
    - How did you evaluate the position of other parties?
    - How did you think your position effects their position?
    - To what extent and how did you create opportunities for other parties to support your interests?
    - How did you decide when to confront (win/lose) or cooperate (win/win or joint gain)?

2. Internal Leadership, Skill Development and Skill
    Transfer:

    - How did you decide which skills were most appropriate?
    - To what extent and why did you use various skills in different situations and with different parties?
    - How did you assess whether a skill was carried out effectively?

- What strategies, techniques, processes and materials
did you use to transfer these skills to community
members/constituents/other staff members?
- Who is involved in such skill development and
transfer and how were they selected?
- How did you evaluate how effectively skills were
developed and transferred?

The Conference Process

Upon arrival in Ann Arbor, each invited expert was hosted by
the PCMA-CCI staff and introduced to other participants. In
addition to connections with the staff, a few of the invited
experts knew each other from previous working relationships. The
retrieval event itself began with the core staff's explanation of
purpose and restatement of the guiding questions.* Participants
queried the staff as to their hoped-for-outcomes, but aside from
reference to exchanges of ideas and discussion, and of the
guiding questions, the staff was able to provide little
additional clarity. It was not the staff's purpose to sustain
doubt or confusion, but in this first-time effort we had little
idea of desired outcomes beyond those previously stated. The
invited experts remained somewhat skeptical about these broad and
fuzzy eventual outcomes, but were willing to suspend judgement
and participate in this process. As a result of these
conversations, we did more elaborate clarification of our own
goals, preparation of informants, and presentation for desired
outcomes in later events.

Case studies of campaigns were presented by 4 participants
and cases of skill development programs by 4 others. Each
presentation was discussed in some detail with questions raised

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*The schedule of activities for this event is included in
Appendix A.

and substantive similarities and differences identified and
clarified. At times differences in language usage (e.g. over the
meaning of "conflict intervention", or "constitutency") and
organizing goals (e.g. what constitutes a successful campaign,
what is leadership) made discussion difficult and forced
participants to focus more clearly on defining terms or giving
illustrations. Disagreements around goals, values and
organizing/training strategies were noted but not pursued to
resolution or conclusion. At times conversation focused on some
of the obvious difference that emerged from these presentations,
and such discussions were open and lively. However, there was no
intent to attain consensus or conversion. In a series of
integrative sessions, the entire group generated a list of their
anomalies and differences, and especially explored the impact of
overarching issues such as race and gender issues, third party
intervention, and the accountability of players in the public
arena.

Substantive Outcomes

One example of the substantive outcomes of this conference
is illustrated in review of the discussion focusing on the
relationships between conflict intervenors and community
organizers. This crucial theme subtly arose early in conference
deliberations and gradually became more overt and potent as
discussion continued. Several times we returned to the question
of the possible and desirable relations that might exist between
community organizers and conflict intervenors. Although there
are many variations of the intervener or change agent role, the

one that became a focus for debate and discussion here was that of the "third party neutral".

The primary differences among organizers and mediators appeared to center on "issue partisanship" versus "issue neutrality" and "process" concerns versus "outcome" concerns. Professional mediators generally were seen to strive for issue impartiality, in contrast to the avowed issue advocacy and partisanship of most organizers. Mediators also emphasized their advocacy of an open process, a matter much in debate among organizers committed primarily to products or outcomes that improve the lives of particular (generally oppressed) constituencies. For instance, some participants suggested that as organizers they generally see themselves as party advocates (working for a particular group of people) or outcome advocates (searching for a particular end or result). Although it was agreed that these differences exist, it was suggested that there was a tendency to portray the differences between community organizers and conflict mediators (at least social justice-oriented mediators) as greater than they actually are. The result of such overstatement may be to stereotype both mediators and organizers as more narrow than they really are, and to suggest little room for overlap or collaboration (see Laue & Cormick (1978) for an early and interesting discussion of alternative mediator roles).

Most of the organizers felt that the use of "disinterested third parties" as mediators can take away too much of the power that community groups work so hard to obtain: control over the

outcome, the power to advocate for oneself, is crucial for most grassroots groups. Moreover, if the mobilization of new power bases has been the impetus for a mediated or negotiated settlement, entry into that settlement process may require (at least temporary) suspension of mobilization - and thus a loss of grassroots power and momentum. In contrast, some other participants argued that mediators do not necessarily take power away or resolve conflict for the parties; rather, they may create an environment in which the parties can best negotiate or advocate for themselves.

Participants agreed that many community groups, those seeking to generate and utilize open conflict as a tool for change, are not interested in or ready for a mediation process. When and if they are ready to settle, it was suggested, mediators may help them decide what they want and how to realize their power. Mediators also may help alter power relations by being a presence or a third party witness who can counter dominance and oppression. There may be other advantages to using a mediator, such as getting information about the character of the other parties and reaching a consensual vision from one's constituency. The questions that remain are: When to bring in a mediator and in what situations? When can a neutral third party be empowering for grassroots organizations and when does it coopt or diminish the prospect for self empowerment? The issue of training in a variety of advocacy or settlement strategies emerged as crucial, since the "when" of either strategy seemed as solvent as the "if".

Conference participants agreed that the use of mediators may be a useful strategy in some conflict situations, and that mediation is only one role that intervenors or change agents may play in community or organizational disputes. Thus, a fundamental issue may not be simply whether to use mediation or not, or advocacy or not, but what kinds of assistance, if any, would help grassroots community organizations achieve their social justice and social change objectives. These are the criteria against which any organizing process or any intervention process should be assessed.

In addition to the traditional role of third party intervenors as mediators, there are other ways in which people external to local grass roots groups may be helpful in local struggles and conflicts. For instance, useful formats may include direct assistance to one of the parties (first party intervention) -- organizing assistance, leadership training, fund-raising, organizational process consultation, gathering of strategic intelligence, efforts to enlighten (or "soften up") leaders of opposing parties, evaluation, and action research (see, for instance, Chesler's (1989) discussion of these options). Each of these different roles and functions suggest some different relationships between organizers (such as those grassroots experts represented at the Conference) and external conflict intervention resources (such as CCI and PCMA staffs).

The following general (real or potential) similarities among participants were noted:

1. Mediators and organizers (at least those present) both see themselves as "agents of reality" helping society recognize difficult facts and make difficult or unpleasant choices. Both are potential agents of conflict resolution.

2. Mediators and organizers seek results which will last. In this search, both recognize the fragility of decisions reached solely as a result of deception or duress.

3. Mediators and organizers recognize that inequitable distribution of power often leads to injustice. This is as true in a mediation or intervention process as it is in the community at large. Both often attempt to neutralize the tools of the most powerful parties and empower the weak to resolve unjust situations.

4. Mediators and organizers both see themselves as aiding parties in conflict, sometimes those in covert conflict and sometimes those in overt conflict.

5. Mediators and organizers are both keen observers of political and social forces at work in conflicts. They recognize that in this society conflicts often occur along the lines of race, gender, and class and that these issues often create problems within organizations as well.

6. Mediators and organizers see themselves as working in different settings, but linked in a broad movement for social change and social justice.

7. Mediators and organizers both recognize the importance of looking beyond immediate campaigns and conflicts to a broader vision of social change and justice.

In addition, it was suggested that mediators and community organizers differ from each other in several ways:

1. Mediators generally desire to ensure proper participation and skills from various (all) parties and are inclined to work for/with multiple parties. Organizers are likely to work for/with one party.

2. Some mediators desire to balance the playing field, and to try to level or equalize power differences among stakeholders. Organizers are likely to accept equalization when they have less power than other parties and reject it when they have more.

3. Mediators believe that resolutions satisfactory to more parties will be more durable, and therefore seek broad representation in resolution proceedings. Organizers are primarily concerned that their group's interests are represented and their needs met.

4. Mediators are likely to be more concerned with a "fair process" itself, while organizers are concerned with success or victory, and are more likely to view process as a means to a substantive outcome.

Perhaps the most critical difference that surfaced was whether and when the change agent plays a third party or a first party role; that is, whether the intervener attempts to be "neutral" with regard to party affiliation and outcome, or whether she/he is allied with and an (overt or covert) advocate for one of the parties and their interests. In general, the CCI staff articulated the third party (but not necessarily neutral) mediator stance, while the PCMA staff more often presented the case for a first party and more partisan intervener role.

Reflections And Evaluations

The PCMA and CCI staffs felt that this first attempt at a retrieval conference had been both successful and instructive. Staffs from the two agencies worked well together, despite some differences in goals, orientations and time/enery resources. The different orientations of the PCMA and CCI staffs sometimes muddied conversations, but often helped highlight explorations about appropriate roles of first-party and third-party intervenors. Participants generally were quite willing to share their experiences and to comment on others' work with little proprietary or competitive tension. While some important differences were acknowledged, they often were not pursued in depth: e.g., differences between Alinsky-style organizing and participatory education efforts; the role of feminist leadership in predominantly male grass-roots organizations; the costs and

benefits of democratic and authoritarian leadership styles and cadres. Part of the explanation for this phenomenon may be the invited experts' lack of acquaintance with one another, and thus their adoption of a cautious stance. Another part of the explanation is that the event may have had little value for these experts and thus they may have invested little in it. Another part of the explanation may be in the lack of ownership or control of the event felt by the invited experts. They were willing to be responsive to the PCMA and CCI agenda, but often queried us as to our goals, whether they were meeting them, were "on track," etc. Our own unclarity about how to use the conference outcomes made it impossible to share direction for an event that was only minimally directed anyway.

Difficulties of coordinating the efforts of the PCMA and CCI staff led to serious delays in constructing and editing a report of this event. Time and energy constraints and geographic distance were hard to overcome. In addition, when participants were provided a draft report, and asked to comment on or correct it prior to publication, further serious delays ensued. When the principal recorder changed jobs, even further delays were encountered in editing and publishing a final report.

In the aftermath of this conference the PCMA and CCI staffs began collaborative relationships with representatives of two of the organizations present at the event. Whether these attempts at collaboration will come to fruition is uncertain.

CHANGING ORGANIZATIONAL RACISM AND SEXISM*

The Conference Design

In the initial design stages for this conference the PCMA faculty, desired to establish better links with other university groups working on issues of racism and sexism. Thus, a planning committee was created of people from several agencies within the University.* By early 1988 (when planning began) The University of Michigan had experience considerable racial conflict, and we had an interest in using this event as a way of influencing the university community as well as retrieving and generating knowledge. Thus, the staff had an action agenda as well as a knowledge-development agenda for this event. The clarity of these goals, as well as the conceptual or ideological among conference planners, distinguished this retrieval event from the initial one described previously.

A preliminary list was compiled of experts consultants who were involved in anti-racism/sexism training or social justice-oriented organizational development programs in complex organizations. Specific attention was paid to representing men and women, and people of color from diverse backgrounds. In most

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*The list of participants and schedule of activities for this event is included in Appendix B. The following discussion draws heavily from Lewis, et al; Retrieveal Conference on Changing Organizational Racism and Sexism. PCMA Working Paper #18, Ann Arbor, January 1989.

*Edith Lewis, (PCMA); Mark Chesler, (PCMA); Sally Johnson, (Office of Human Resource Development -- HRD); Eleanor Linn, (Program for Education Opportunity - PEO); and Roderick Linzie.

cases, the experts were known to at least one planning committee member, either personally or through their written work. An attempt was made to choose persons who were well versed in the theoretical and practical literature on racism and sexism in organizations and who had experience as practicing consultants or change agents (the core participants in this retrieval event are listed in Appendix B).

In addition, approximately 20 university/community colleagues who consult, teach and/or do research on such issues were invited and attended as an "interactive audience". A local audience was invited for three purpose: (1) we knew numerous campus colleagues had interest and expertise in these areas of inquiry; (2) we wished to increase the immediate impact of this event on local organizational units; and (3) we wished to broaden "ownership" of the event and our own network. However, in order to maintain an orderly process of inquiry, and to sustain an intimate atmosphere among key participants, the format allowed for the primary participation of the Program on Conflict Management Alternatives , Human Resource Development and Programs for Educational Opportunity staffs, and the external experts. Additional participants were invited with the understanding that they would have the opportunity to learn from the invited experts (and each other), to raise questions, but not to participate fully in the discussions. This was an experimental approach, meant to test the options of fully closed vs fully open meetings of our privileged access to experts vs broader educational or investigative dialogue.

As experts were contacted in the early summer of 1988, they were sent a set of questions outlining the focus of the retrieval event and asked about their interest in participating in such an activity. Most responded with great interest, remarking that they did not often have an opportunity to share their work with others engaged in similar efforts and were looking forward to the occasion. They were contacted at several intervals during the summer and fall of 1988 and asked to respond to elements of the conference design.

Joint work among PCMA core faculty and HRD and PEO staff revealed an interest in developing a mechanism to watch these consultants work, as well as to engage in conversations about their work. Given the recent events on the U of M campus with respect to racism and sexism, the University seemed to be a natural laboratory for such work. We generated a list of campus and community units which were potentially interested in changing their own organizational racism and/or sexism. An iterative process was begun which involved conference planners, the invited experts, and campus units in matching units and invited experts for brief change-related consultations. An effort was made to learn something different in each match. For example, a unit with an existing group already involved in challenging racism and sexism was matched with one consultant, while another consultant was matched with a unit which had been charged to change but in which no work had yet begun. One of the invited experts with a strong history of work within public school systems was paired

with members of the office charged with this work in a local
public school system.

Since each expert had been involved in consultations with
different kinds of organizations, we asked them to come prepared
to focus on one of their interventions, and to present a case
study, as it related to the questions raised in the conference
agenda. In addition, we asked all experts to forward their vitae
and a sample of their written work, so as to inform everyone
about one another in advance of their arrival on campus. These
packets of information also were sent to the participating campus
units to assist them in preparing for their interaction with the
consultants.

The Questions Addressed

The planning committee first developed a set of questions
related to efforts to change organizational racism and sexism.
These questions are listed below:

Racism, Sexism, and Their Interaction

1.   What are the underlying assumptions or conceptions about
     racism, sexism in organizations or society which guide your
     work?

2.   What strategies have you used which you think are more or
     less successful in your work on racism/sexism (e.g. teams
     versus single presenter, inclusion/exclusion of certain
     members, integration of short-term events and long-term
     relationships, insiders and outsiders)?

3.   Do you perceive differences in the ways people handle racism
     versus sexism in this work? What are these? Why are they
     different?

4.   Is the interaction of racism and sexism more powerful than
     the single issues alone or do they distract from one
     another? In what ways? How do you avoid these issues being
     played off one another...by others and yourself at times?

Altering Racism/Sexism In Organizations

1. How do you move in your work from a focus on increasing individual awareness to changing organizational structures and cultures? What ideas guide you in this effort? What specific tactics do you use?

2. How do you connect with local aggrieved/oppressed groups and/or local power brokers? How do you conduct (or help the organization conduct) a diagnosis or assessment?

3. Which strategies have been most effective in challenging/changing the organizational power or culture that sustain racism, sexism, or their interaction?

4. What are some organizational changes that realistically can make a difference in racism and sexism, and that actually can be leveraged by a consultant (or team) like yourself? What conditions have to be in place for changes to occur? What are the "traps" in trying?

5. How do you build in a process of ongoing change, so that outcomes do not end when your involvement ends?

The Conference Process

Most of the invited experts arrived in Ann Arbor the evening before the retrieval event began, and met with the planning team for a late dinner and "get-acquainted session." At this time informal discussion of the nature of the conference and design were shared in detail. When the "consultation" portion of the event was explained (wherein each expert would meet and work with a campus or community unit on issues or racism/sexism) it became clear to everyone that we were engaged in an intervention into the University of Michigan organization as well as in a co-learning activity. This discussion permitted the invited experts to understand and establish joint ownership for the agenda and events that followed.

In the morning of the first day, 3 experts presented case studies of their work, with extensive discussion. In the afternoon they and the other 3 outside experts met with separate campus and community units, to perform real-time consultations. A debriefing session among the experts and staff followed. The second day concentrated on a series of focused discussions based upon the case presentations, the consultations, and the general work activities and work of all the experts and staff.

Substantive Outcomes

A list of "principles" of changing organizational racism and sexism summarized the retrieval conference learnings, as developed by the participants in a final brainstorming session. For brevity purposes, a sample of the 48 principles is repeated here.

1. Definitions of racism and sexism, like racism and sexism themselves, are matters of debate and conflict. Most people need help in understanding the difference between institutional racism/sexism and individual prejudice, and between "conscious" intentions and "unintended" consequences of behavior.

2. Short-term crises (symptoms which often spur the call for assistance) should be connected to long-term problems and an agenda for change. The generation of such crises (by external or internal constituencies) often is a necessary first step in the change process.

3. The process of change requires population/constituency differentiation and later integration, not assimilation of disadvantaged or oppressed groups into the mainstream culture and structure.

4. Change must occur at all levels: individual, group, unit, and total organization. Personal growth/learning and institutional change must occur simultaneously.

5. Top management must be publicly committed to change...and model it. One can "test" this commitment

in public behavior as well as in speech, and in time, energy, money, and support provided.

6. Management's understanding of the organization's problems with regard to racism and sexism usually has to be broadened. Even well-intentioned and enlightened managers seldom understand the subtle/covert breadth and depth of organizational and personal racism and sexism...and the changes that are required to move toward a just environment.

7. Since the organizational culture must be altered to achieve long-term change, it often is necessary to fracture illusions of consensus or homogeneity around key organizational values (e.g. definitions of "excellence" or "competence" or "merit" or "talent" or "efficiency", etc.).

8. There must be clear benefits to individuals and units leading the change efforts. If incentives and positive rewards are built in (and negative sanctions also available), the reward and incentive structure, and therefore self-interest alignments, can be altered.

9. The mobilization of external constituencies and resources that can aid the change process is crucial. Most organizations are at least somewhat dependent on external forces and vulnerable to pressure from them.

10. Internal advocates for change include organizational members who are able to provide information, take the lead in local change efforts, or connect the consultant to others committed to change. Over the long haul, only a strong group of internal advocates can generate the sustained skill and will for change.

11. All must be prepared to escalate internal conflicts in order to surface issues of racism and sexism clearly. The search for potential coalitions among aggrieved groups and/or with disaffected or highly committed members of powerful groups can hasten the process of re-integration.

12. Multicultural and well-integrated consultant teams are needed.

13. Consultants must create patterns of accountability and monitoring with people of color and women who are part of the organization and/or part of key external constituencies.

Reflections And Evaluations

It was clear from this event that preparing invited experts in advance (i.e., with substantial written material and with an informal discussion before the actual conference began) allowed issues of trust, conference purposes and level of concern about the event to surface. In contrast to the first event, the experts in this conference were clearer about the purpose, freer to influence the agenda, and readier to pursue issues and disagreements with us and with one another.

We also learned some of the many ways which a retrieval conference may be viewed as an intervention, in that its existence has the potential to change the organization in which it is conducted. Those audience members who were not part of the "inner circle" of invited experts and staff found that their learning had been increased in a manner which gave them new insights about their jobs on the campus. Having an audience changed the dynamics of the group interaction only slightly, perhaps because the audience had been cast in a relatively inactive role. However, many of these audience members attended other events sponsored by PCMA in the subsequent months.

We used the model of pairing invited experts with existing units so as to have the dual opportunities to watch the consultants work as well as to provide some useful information and intervention to the units. For most of the participants, and for those who were paired with them, this was an exciting learning mechanism. It was only a taste however; both consultants and units indicated that not enough time had been

allotted for real work (of a diagnostic or change-oriented character) to occur. Several of the invited participants also suggested that the brief consultation portion of the conference might have been extended and used to examine plans and opportunities for change in several units on other college campuses. Several of the experts have been invited back to the University to conduct work with these or other units. Our PCMA staff also has maintained contact with the experts with fellow conference planners, and with involved units, with potential collaborative work a possibility.

Finally, we decided to prepare a brief report of this event rapidly, and captured and disseminated the major "learnings" or principles shortly after the event. As before, a draft report was shared with all consultants prior to final editing and publication. The creation of a briefer, but more rapidly available report, was welcomed by everyone.

EMPOWERMENT IN INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND COMMUNITIES*

The focus of the third retrieval conference was on discussion and analysis of the different meanings of empowerment, the multiple levels on which empowerment works, and the relationships among these levels. The conference focused on strategies and skills for dealing with conflicts that arise when attempting to empower individuals, organizations and communities, and case studies of empowerment efforts. This topic grew out of

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* The following discussion draws heavily from Gerschick, et al Means of Empowerment in Individuals, Organizations and Communities, Ann Arbor, PCMA, 1990. The list of participants and the agenda are included in Appendix C.

the PCMA faculty's research and intervention efforts as well as our year-long seminar activities. Thus, considerable staff discussion and experience preceded this retrieval conference, in marked contrast to the ways in which the other retrieval conferences had initiated or occurred simultaneously with staff seminars and explorations.

The Questions Addressed

In the initial design stages for this conference a list of questions related to empowerment were developed by PCMA core group members Barbara Israel and Barry Checkoway. General questions included the following.

(1) What is meant by empowerment? What are its components or determinants at the individual, organizational, and community levels? What are the criteria or indicators of successful empowerment?

(2) What are some strategies and skills for empowerment? What are the phases of an empowering process? What are the roles of key participants in the process?

(3) What internal and external conflicts can we expect to develop during a process of empowerment?

(4) What are some case examples of past or present empowerment? What lessons can be learned from them?

(5) What are some innovative or exemplary means of empowering traditionally oppressed people? What is the role of conflict escalation in the attempt to increase individual or collective empowerment?

(6) What are the characteristics and means of an empowering approach to research?

(7) What are the characteristics and means of an empowering approach to education and training?

(8) What are the characteristics and means of an empowering approach to consultation?

(9)   What are the directions for the future?   What are the
      implications for future practice, education, and research?

The Conference Design

Concurrently with the development of these questions, a
preliminary list was generated of experts whose work involved
empowerment. Specific attention was paid to inviting a diverse
group of people, most of whom were known by at least one PCMA
member, either personally or through their written work. Persons
were selected who were well versed in the theoretical and
practical literature on empowerment as well as experienced in
practitioner or change agent capacities. In addition to the 6
external experts, 5 University of Michigan colleagues
participated as a core group. A broad range of other colleagues
were invited to attend the event, with the understanding that
they would be able to ask questions, contribute and participate
in small and large group discussions at selected times during the
conference.

Response to PCMA invitations indicated a great deal of
interest in the idea of a retrieval conference which would help
bridge the gap between academic theory/research and practice on
empowerment. The different invited experts were asked to focus
on different areas of this general problem, so as to draw on a
range of levels and strategies. In addition, these experts and
our core staff members provided copies of their vitae and samples
of their written work on empowerment, which were distributed to
all participants prior to the event.

The format of the conference was as follows: the 11 core
participants presented their definitions and case studies; the

core group discussed the issues generated, and then the
discussion was opened to include the entire group. Thus, the
audience at times interacted directly with invited experts and
core staff members.

Substantive Outcomes

In order to illustrate the nature and results of this event,
summaries of some of the presentations, discussions and working
group sessions are discussed below. For instance, each item in
the following summary on represents one core participant's
perspective on the question: What is empowerment?

1. Empowerment is a dual process: A) where people change their
    beliefs and assumptions of how the world operates and B)
    where people gain the ability to act on these new beliefs
    and assumptions to increase their self-efficacy. It occurs
    best as a collective effort and within a community, whether
    a geographical or spiritual community, because this provides
    support and consequently sustains change. The goals must be
    generated by the community, not by the practitioner or
    researcher. When outsiders' needs and assumptions are
    different from what the community wants to do, the
    community's needs must take precedence.

2. Empowerment involves both process and outcomes. It is
    important that people have control over their lives and the
    outcomes that result from their decisions. People must be
    able to satisfy both their basic material needs and their
    other needs as well.

3. There are multiple levels of empowerment. One is individual
    efficacy, where a person feels s/he can accomplish
    something. The second is organizational development, and
    the third is community change. Although all three levels
    are vital because of the positive impact on the wider
    community, on the individual, and vice versa, it is
    possible only one level will be achieved. Achieving one
    level is good, two levels is better and three levels is
    best. It is not good or bad empowerment but good, better,
    best.

4. Practitioners and organizers and intervenors must ask
    themselves: Empowerment for what? What characteristics
    does a empowered person have? These questions sensitize us
    to the different situations in which we intervene.

Empowerment must occur in a horizontal mode rather than in a vertical mode.

5. Empowerment is a process. Everyone has power in some situations. The key to empowerment is to determine the form that power takes, the power others have over us, the relationship between the two, and how we can alter the dynamics of this interaction. The process of organizing addresses these issues.

6. Social change and empowerment are not the same thing. Empowerment can occur without social change just as social change can occur without empowerment. As Freire noted, empowerment means both individual empowerment and redistribution of resources. Empowerment must also occur at the global level. It is not enough to empower oneself or a community if that means disempowering someone else or another community in a different part of the world. Local issues must be understood globally. Context, then, becomes paramount.

7. Power is the central focus of practice and alerts us to what we should be focusing on and how to help communities and people gain power, as opposed to the illusion of power. Focusing on power moves us beyond perception to action.

8. We cannot "give" people power. Rather we can transfer skills and tools which can be used by individuals to gain power over their lives. Empowerment also is a continuous process throughout one's lifetime.

9. Empowerment is a process of using conflict to overcome violence. The matter of violence (in it's many forms) is central to the topic of empowerment. Separating them fails to come to terms with the roots of what we are dealing with. Failing to empower all people has awesome consequences for their life-chances, it literally means sacrificing some people. Empowerment is impossible without conflict. The blocks of power necessary to overcome violence are pivotal because they are rooted in the oppression of women, people of color, poor people, gays and lesbians, and children. The oppression of children is the base that all other forms are laid over.

10. An additional outcome of empowerment is spiritual resources: the deep connectedness we have with all forms of life. We can't come to terms with the violence that is epidemic among us without first coming to terms with the unique means of solidarity we have with all life's processes and with each other.

11. As informed by Freire, empowerment incorporates three primary dimensions: A) the development of a more powerful and potent sense of self, B) construction of more critical

comprehension of the web of social and political relations which comprise one's environment, and C) cultivation of functional competence for efficacious attainment of personal and collective goals. Hence, empowerment is the process of developing participatory competence.

In the afternoon of the second day invited experts, core staff and audience - divided into small working groups to discuss in more depth questions and issues that arose during the course of the conference. The working groups then reported back the content of their discussions to the larger group. To summarize:

Question: Can academics do participatory research that empowers individuals and communities, from within the University? If so, how?

1. Academics need to understand the obstacles within the university to such work. Participatory research, and the people who do it, are a perceived threat to the current alignment of power in communities and the university. There is also a lack of funding support (governmental and university) for this kind of research. The academic power structure looks on it as investigative or anecdotal/journalistic research and does not value it.

2. Academics should continue to develop the participatory research paradigm. They need to develop standards against which they can measure the quality of such work, to seek funding for work that will help in systematizing the development of this paradigm and to support small scale projects from which a base can be developed.

3. There is difficulty in action or participatory research being accepted at the University. Academics need to empower people who are involved with it.

4. Academics may need to find other forms of institutional support to provide funding for this kind of work. This may mean an alternative type of structure or operational base. They may also need to establish a journal as an alternative for publishing their research and process. This would allow them to share while they are publishing.

Question: What are the similarities and differences between empowerment in an adversarial model and in a collaborative model?

The adversarial model of empowerment assumes that the issue/problem is more defined and also assumes that there is more of a community to draw on. The collaborative model of empowerment is closer to locality development and may be a precursor to the adversarial model. Goals and tactics of the movement/group will influence the choice of the model. Either of these models can fuel the other so they are not necessarily incompatible.

Four major questions or themes arose in the discussion

throughout the two days. They included:

1. Who sets the agenda in empowerment activities? For instance, a trainer or consultant or practitioner who attempts to "give" power to people may create further dependency. Co-development of the empowerment agenda must be foremost, even if there needs to be negotiation or mutual education about this agenda in the help-giving process, especially in communities that lack critical consciousness and mobilized constituencies.

2. Should the practitioner of empowerment be primarily an organizer or a provider of direct services? Direct service provision may in some cases perpetuate disempowerment, but sustained lack of vital services also perpetuates disempowerment and often frustrates the empowerment process. both strategies are needed, although the same person may not be able conduct both.

3. How important is the context within which empowerment activities occur? Different aspects of the setting, the existence and role of larger social structures, local history, and cultural traditions may require different empowerment tactics.

4. With what vision, or to what purposes, is empowerment directed? Is it enough simply to be empowered, or is what one does when one is empowered also important? "Empowerment for what" was addressed as a vital issue in developing long range goals and clear understandings between community or organizational groups and practitioners or specialists.

Some of these issues were highlighted in a lengthy

discussion comparing the empowerment tactics of Saul Alinksky

with those of Paulo Friere. In the model attributed to Alinsky,

people who participate in social action may learn how to think

and may develop a critical consciousness: reflection comes after

social action. Freire's conception is that by helping people

learn how to think one helps them determine how to organize.

Education which leads to critical consciousness is a

transformational approach to empowerment. With Freire,

reflection comes prior to action and helps people transcend the

restrictions of official knowledge. As one participant

suggested:

> As organizers, I think we've often thought that the focal
> point is political power and we tended to stress action. We
> tended to ignore culture and socialization. So I think
> Freire's model of power sensitizes us to the struggles over
> knowledge as an important part of the empowerment process.

It was suggested that one of the limitations of the Alinsky model

was precisely its lack of sensitivity to this issue.

> When people know there is a problem, you can start
> determining how to address it. But what about situations
> where people have a problem but they don't know it is a real
> problem? I know it sounds elitist to think people have
> problems that they don't recognize, but we do. So you can't
> start talking about organizing to overcome the power until
> you start talking about dealing with the consciousness of
> what the problem was in the first place.

> There are organizations that Alinsky organized where people
> were trotted out for social events but had no idea what was
> happening, and nothing changed. When this occurs, I think
> that is bad.

Thus some conference participants argued that mobilization for

action did not necessarily lead to the development of a more

critical consciousness. Several participants reported that they

had experienced single issue organizations that effectively used

Alinsky-like tactics to gain limited victories, but that often did not develop an on-going organization that altered community power relations or participation patterns over time. In the worst cases, the only roles for the people were as "the masses" who deferred to the experts, hence not an empowering process. This discussion in The Conference mirrored the ongoing debate in the field of community organizing.

Freire's model also had its limitations according to some participants:

> ...in Freire's model, it is possible to have critical consciousness but not be able to see how to act. It is a fallacy to believe if you have critical consciousness and you act, you are empowered because you can act at the wrong times and places. Thus you can actually retard rather than advance your goals.

These two models of individual and community empowerment are competitive in some respects, but also complementary, as the following statement indicates.

> Highlander is patterned after Horton who emphasized that you "teach people how to think and they will figure out how to organize". Midwest Academy more closely follows Alinsky's belief that you "teach people how to organize and they will learn how to think". The two have to go together. SO it is more of a question of starting point and also which language you are using as a starting point...It is crucial that we not say that one is better than another but rather look at them as options at different points in time.

Clearly both sets of skills and both tactical approaches are necessarily to any successful long-term empowerment effort.

Reflections And Evaluations

At the end of the second day of the conference, time was spent critiquing the conference process and content. It was

clear from the comments that most participants found the conference very stimulating and thought-provoking.

> I felt privileged being a part of this. The diversity
> and richness of the people and their experiences, while
> still having common bonds, creates confidence and hope.

> Being an outsider as an academic, the conference was
> very beneficial. There are parallel paths, different
> processes with different names but the similarities
> abound.

However, it also was apparent that the format had not worked as well as anticipated. Dividing the group into core participants and audience left some people in the audience feeling disenfranchised and underutilized. Although this dynamic was caused, in part, by the complexity of the issue of empowerment and the short time frame of the conference, the question of what role an audience can or should play, and how to set and keep appropriate expectations about participation, is unresolved.

Even though the conference planners were pleased with the level of discourse and the enthusiasm expressed by conference participants, they shared many of the concerns mentioned above. In subsequent discussions critiquing the event, the PCMA faculty analyzed the strengths and limitations of the "retrieval conference" format. One recognition was that at the previous two retrieval conferences, the entire group of participants experts, staff and audience did not exceed eighteen persons. As a result, there were only a few people present who were not members of the "core" group. Both the first and second conferences were held in relatively small meeting rooms, and there was less sense of an "outsider" audience. Thus, there was considerably more time for

in-depth discussion and retrieval among all participants. In
planning the empowerment conference, numerous persons from the
area were identified who would be interested in and could
contribute to the topic of the conference. Hence, the decision
was made to invite a larger number of participants.
Unfortunately, the idea and format of a retrieval conference was
set in place, and little consideration was given to the
limitations of the design as a result of the larger "audience".
Given the richness of the experience and expertise represented by
the participants, a much more effective format would have
included more time for small group discussions.

As with previous conferences, the retrieval conference on
empowerment impacted on the organization within which it
occurred. One result was that PCMA staff were able to create
relationships with new colleagues on campus (audience members),
and to play a role in ongoing conversations about empowerment
issues and projects. In fact, the event led directly to staff
participation in a Detroit Area Study project analyzing survey
data on empowerment attitudes of the general citizenry. In
addition, partly because of the tighter focus of the event and
partly because of our experience constructing such reports, the
published report of this event is perhaps the most sophisticated

of all three reports.

CONCLUSIONS

Similarities And Differences Among The Three Retrieval Events

Along with the substantive knowledge generated and gained
from these events, we also have thought about their construction
and operation. Since each event was constructed somewhat
differently, we are able to make some distinctions amongst them.

1. The GRASSROOTS retrieval event was the most highly
structured, with participation limited to invited experts and our
own (PCMA and CCI) staffs. The RACISM AND SEXISM event was
opened more broadly to colleagues on campus; in fact, invited
experts met with campus organizations and did on-site consulting
with them. The EMPOWERMENT event was opened even more fully,
with substantial participation from an audience. Although the
level of participatory dialogue and overall learning was probably
greater at the EMPOWERMENT event, the greater audience
participation made it more difficult to focus on the initial
questions our staff had in mind. While this was awkward it was
not necessarily counter-productive; evolving issues and concerns
sometimes generated new and important issues that were fruitful
to explore.

2. The EMPOWERMENT event was planned and conducted
completely by our own PCMA staff. The RACISM AND SEXISM event
was co-planned with representatives from two other campus
agencies (HRD and PEO). And the GRASSROOTS event was co-planned

and co-conducted by representatives of two geographically separate and intellectually varied Programs working in the area of conflict intervention and resolution (PCMA and CCI). Leadership differences and consequent negotiations were most pronounced, although by no means dysfunctional, in the GRASSROOTS event, and most minimal in the EMPOWERMENT event.

3. The GRASSROOTS and EMPOWERMENT events generally stayed within the structure of an invited seminar and exchange, while the RACISM AND SEXISM event flowed over into an more direct intervention in several campus units.

Lessons Learned -- Or, Guidelines for Another Retrieval Event

Our experience in creating three retrieval events has been very positive. We have learned a great deal, and so have most of the expert scholars, practitioners and audiences attending them. We also have learned a number of lessons about how such events might be better managed in the future.

1. Each event must have a clear focus or foci. General exploration of a vague area of interest leads to many side-conversations that, while interesting, may not clarify the fundamental concerns of organizers or participants. Unclarity about content and goals also can lead to a feeling of having made little progress, or of not knowing what constitutes progress. This is especially important if the people coming to the event do not know each other well, or have not worked together previously, and have little commonality other than the agenda and announced focus.

2. The agency and personnel planning and facilitating the event must take clear and continuous leadership responsibility. In a short event -- two or three days -- there simply isn't time for a natural process of leadership development to emerge from the participants. A facilitative leader must anticipate issues of competition and conflicts among individuals' styles or positions on issues, and be prepared to manage such issues productively -- in the joint interests of productive work sessions and a supportive interpersonal climate

3. Good preparation requires written and phone contact with all participants ahead of time, early sharing of the agenda and organizing questions, and constant follow-up to retrieve written material, clarify expectations, arrange travel schedules, make last-minute substitutions, etc.

4. It is important to distribute ahead of time vitae, written articles and other materials that may help introduce participants to one another.

5. Selection of participants is dependent upon the purposes involved. If the purpose is to create a meaningful dialogue between field and academic experts one must recruit real field experts, not academics with some field familiarity or applied interests. Moreover, the field experts or practitioners who are invited must be willing to reflect upon their work, whether in writing or not. In like fashion, the academic experts invited must have some practical knowledge of field issues. Otherwise, the dialogue is too difficult to create and people will spend

most of their time clarifying language or defending their occupational roles and statuses.

6. Our experience suggests that it is important to select (at least some) participants who are personally known to the staff ahead of time. This procedure is most likely to ensure a group that can talk collaboratively with one another and hastens the trust or community-building process necessary for honest and fruitful dialogue.

7. Time must be allotted for informal contact and conversation, in settings where participants can relax and "feel one another out." Too often, practitioner experts and academic experts have a proprietary concern about their special knowledge and feel hesitant about sharing their hard-won secrets with one another, either within or across status lines, without some sense of comradeship. On occasion, this comradeship will have political dimensions as well, and it may be important for all participants to share a commitment to the political as well as intellectual goals of their work together. This concern may be more overt for practitioners than for academics, but it is likely to affect all discussions.

8. Interpersonal process, group dynamics, and race/gender/status issues can be expected to arise within the context of a retrieval event, just as they will within any group endeavor. At times, these dynamics may be part of the topic under discussion, as when trust between participants splits along practitioner-academic lines, or when racism and sexism is the focal concern. At times, issues of interpersonal competition,

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dominance and control may surface. Disciplined attention to these issues requires suggesting their presence as well as focusing on them before they arise, working on them diligently as they arise, and emphasizing that they cannot "overtake" the originally contracted agenda.

9. The inviting staff should be prepared to participate actively, perhaps to make presentations, and certainly to lead discussions. If the host staff does not do so it may encourage expert performance rather than collaboration. It may also appear that organizers are adopting a passive posture toward the knowledge-generation process, and are withholding their own expertise and experience. Such a stance directly contradicts the concerns for mutual expertise, two-way flows of information, and the democratization of knowledge.

10. If an audience is involved, or if various participants are expected to play more or less active roles, these expectations must be made clear. The participatory nature of exchanges created at a retrieval event often blur contractual arrangements about separated roles. At the same time, such arrangements, or clarifications and rearrangements, must be made with the primary objectives of the event clearly in mind. Larger audiences may multiply the resources available in a knowledge-generation process, but they also may diffuse the focus on invited experts.

11. Effective recording of content and process requires the presence of a notetaker, with or without taped proceedings. We did tape all proceedings, and graduate student notetakers drafted

reports from their own notes and these tapes. In addition, draft write-ups of the event should be shared with participants as soon after the event as possible. Otherwise, busy people will have forgotten their contributions and exchanges, and be in a poor position to check or monitor draft reports and findings. On this basis final reports can be prepared.

12. Although we conceptualized these retrieval events as part of an action research process, only in the RACISM & SEXISM conference did people engage in action with one another. Rather, we utilized reflection on the action efforts of participants to drive discussion and the generation of knowledge.

13. If the retrieval event was successful in generating a collaborative process of knowledge creation future working relationships between the host organization and invited experts can be pursued. The GRASSROOTS conference led to explorations of our future work with two experts; the RACISM & SEXISM conference has led to collaborative work with three experts; the EMPOWERMENT conference has led to several long term collaborative projects with one expert.

The retrieval conference is an example of a participatory action-research process at work. Researchers' and scientists' dominance in creating "knowledge" is avoided in operations that respect the knowledge and intellectual authority or expertise generated in the field. A constant dialectic engages information from both academic research and the social world. Scholars join with citizen-experts in a process designed to create both new

knowledge and higher order wisdom that is useful in the solution
to social problems and in the improvement of the world we all
share.

APPENDIX A: RETRIEVAL CONFERENCE ON GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY
ORGANIZING AND CONFLICT INTERVENTION

Core Participants:

Invited Experts

Pat Callair, Grassroots Leadership, in South Carolina.
Gary Delgado, the Center for Third World Organizing (TWO) in California.
Liz DiCarlo, the Women's Center in New Bedford, Massachusetts.
Elena Hanngi, Director of the Institute for Social Justice, an affiliate
    of ACORN.
Tom Holler, Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS) in San
    Antonio, Texas.
Michael Schechtman, Director of the Northern Rockies Action Group,
    Montana.

Core Staff

Frank Blechman, the Conflict Clinic.
Barry Checkoway, Professor of Social Work, University of Michigan.
Mark Chesler, Professor of Sociology, University of Michigan.
Jim Crowfoot, Dean of the School of Natural Resources, University of
    Michigan.
Helen Cunningham, doctoral student and research assistant for PCMA,
    (Recorder).
Elizabeth Douvan, Professor of Psychology, University of Michigan.
Barbara Israel, Professor of Public Health, University of Michigan.
Edith Lewis, Professor of Social Work, University of Michigan.
Bill Potapchuk, the Conflict Clinic.

Helen Weingarten, Professor of Social Work, University of Michigan.

AGENDA

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

Monday 6/6/88

10:00	Introductions, logistics, plans for Meeting	Barbara Israel
11:00	Presentation of cases of campaigns (3)	Frank Blechman, Mike Schechtman, Tom Holler
1:00	Break for Lunch	
2:00	Case presentations (1)	Bill Potapchuk
2:30	Comparison of cases and synthesis	Mark Chesler, Frank Blechman
4:00	Break	
4:30	Presentation of skill development programs	Edie Lewis
5:30	Discussion of how the day went, where we are, and plans for Tuesday	Frank Blechman Barry Checkoway
7:00 .	Dinner Together and Informal Discussions	

Tuesday 6/7/88

8:30	Presentation of skill development programs (2)	Bill Potapchuk Barry Checkoway
10:30	Comparison of skill development programs and synthesis	Jim Crowfoot
12:00	Break for Lunch	
1:00	Pulling it all together: Where do we go now?	Frank Bleckman, Barbara Israel
3:00	End	
4:30	CCI and PCMA Debrief	

Appendix B:

RETRIEVAL CONFERENCE ON CHANGING RACISM AND SEXISM IN ORGANIZATIONS

Core Participants

Invited Experts

Rudolfo Alvarez, Professor of Sociology, UCLA.
Elise Cross, President and Senior Consultant, Elsie Y. Cross Associates,
            Inc., Philadelphia.
Frances Kendall, Interim Executive Director, Bay Area Independent School
            Minority Affairs Coalition, Oakland, California.
Richard Salem, Senior Consultant, Richard A. Salem Associates, Chicago.
Bennie Stovall, Executive Director, Children's Aid Society, and Adjunct
            Professor, University of Michigan.
Leroy Wells, Jr., Professor of Business, Howard University, Washington,
            D.C.

Core Staff

Barry Checkoway, Professor of Social Work, University of Michigan.
Mark Chesler, Professor of Sociology, University of Michigan.
James Crowfoot, Dean, School of Natural Resources,
            University of Michigan
Elizabeth Douvan, Professor of Psychology and Women's Studies,
            University of Michigan.
Barbara Israel, Professor of Health and Health Education, University of
            Michigan.
Sally Johnson, Manager of Human Resource Development, (HRD) University
            of Michigan.
Edith Lewis, Professor of Social Work, University of Michigan.
Eleanor Linn, Associate Director, Programs for Educational Opportunity
            (PEO), School of Education, University of Michigan.
Roderick Linzie, doctoral candidate in Sociology, University of Michigan
            (Recorder).
David Schoem, Assistant Dean, College of Literature, Science, and the
            Arts, University of Michigan.

AGENDA

Thursday, November 10, 1988
Racism, Sexism, and Their Interactions

8:30	Coffee	
9:00	Welcoming and Introductions	Edith Lewis, PCMA
9:30	Case Presentations (Kendall, Cross, Stovall)	

10:30	- Break -	
10:45	Discussion of Cases	James Crowfoot, PCMA
12:00	- Lunch -	Anderson Room
1:00-4:00	Consultancy Session - Closed -	Various Sites
4:00-6:00	Debrief consultancies	

Friday, November 11, 1988
Altering Racism and Sexism in Organizations

8:30	Coffee	
9:00	Introductions	Edith Lewis, PCMA
9:15	Session 1	Sally Johnson, HRD
10:30	- Break -	
10:45	Session 2	Barry Checkoway, PCMA
12:00	- Lunch -	Anderson Room
1:00	Session 3	Barbara Israel, PCMA
2:30	- Break -	
3:00	Session 4: Synthesis and Wrap-Up	Edith Lewis, PCMA, Mark Chesler, PCMA

Appendix C:

Core Participants:

<u>Invited Experts</u>

Eugenia Eng, Assistant Professor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill in the Department of Health Behavior and Health Education.

John Gaventa, Director of the Highlander Research and Education Center located in New Market, Tennessee and Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Tennessee.

Lorraine Gutierrez, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Washington, Seattle.

Jackie Kendall, Director of the Midwest Academy in Chicago.

Felix Rivera, Professor of Social Work at San Francisco State University.

Barbara Solomon, Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Southern California and Professor in the School of Social Work.

Core Faculty

Barry Checkoway, Professor in the School of Social Work at the
University of Michigan.
Mark Chesler, Professor of Sociology at the University of Michigan.
Jim Crowfoot, Dean and Professor in the School of Natural Resources at
the University of Michigan.
Thomas J. Gerschick, University of Michigan, Department of Sociology
(Recorder).
Barbara Israel, Associate Professor in the School of Public Health in
the Department of Health Behavior and Health Education at the
University of Michigan.
Edith Lewis, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at the
University of Michigan.

And about 40 university/community colleagues as an "interactive
audience"

MEANS OF EMPOWERMENT IN INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND COMMUNITIES

AGENDA

MONDAY, MAY 8

8:30	Arrival and Coffee
9:00	Welcome and Introductions
	Barbara Israel and Barry Checkoway
9:30	What Is Empowerment?
	Facilitator: Barbara Israel
11:00	Break
11:15	Empowering Individuals
	Presenter: Barbara Solomon
	Facilitator: Barry Checkoway
12:30	Lunch
1:30	Empowering Organizations
	Presenter: Jim Crowfoot
	Facilitator: Mark Chesler
3:00	Break
3:15	Empowering Communities
	Presenters: Eugenia Eng & Felix Rivera
	Facilitator: Lorraine Gutierrez

5:00   Evaluation & Closing of Day One
            Barry Checkoway and Barbara Israel

TUESDAY, MAY 9

8:30   Arrival and Coffee

9:00   Welcome and Introduction, Day Two
            Barry Checkoway and Barbara Israel

9:15   Empowering Education and Training
            Presenter: Jackie Kendall
            Facilitator: Edith Lewis

10:45   Break

11:00   Action and Participatory Research
            Presenter: John Gaventa
            Facilitator: Jim Crowfoot

12:30   Lunch

1:30   Working Groups

3:00   Synthesis Session
            Barbara Israel and Barry Checkoway

4:00   Evaluation and Conference Closing

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