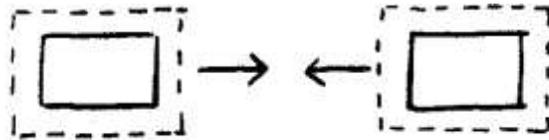


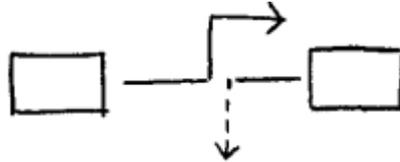
## OPV: OTHER PEOPLE'S VIEWS

Most thinking is not to do with puzzles and games. Most thinking is to do with other people. It is therefore unfortunate that Western civilization has developed - and continues very much to encourage - a type of thinking that is wasteful, inefficient and getting ever more dangerous. Western civilization in its philosophy and in its practice has been obsessed with the 'clash' system in which two opposing views fight it out. This covers argument, debate, the adversary system in general and dialectics. The method pervades our politics, our courts, our business decisions and day to day living. From a clash of opposing views a better one will emerge, even adopted this as our only method of change.

The disadvantages of the clash system are many. As one side attacks and the other side defends, each point of view grows ever more rigid and unable to develop. This is suggested in the figure below. The need to attack and defend precludes more useful thinking.



In the clash system one or other point of view will eventually prevail, as in a political election. The other group is bitter and disappointed and unwilling to make the new system work. Since in some electoral systems the losers may outnumber the winners, this bitterness matters a great deal. This disappointment is suggested in the figure below.



In most areas the major defect of the clash system is that in order to even begin to think about change, the existing idea must first be attacked. Not only must it be attacked, but it must be shown to be inadequate. This is the most complete nonsense imaginable. An idea may have been a good one in its time and may still be a good idea. But this does not preclude the possibility of a much better idea. We may never be able to prove the existing idea inadequate (especially when working from within the concepts created by that idea) so we are never able to explore for change. Another huge disadvantage of this method is that if we have to destroy the existing idea in order to start looking for a better idea, then, if we do not find a better idea, we have nothing to come back to. We are left without a base. This is one of the great dangers of adversary politics in which each side spends so much time attacking the other that the credibility of both is destroyed. There are no winners in that sort of argument. In the Japanese system, as mentioned earlier, the security of the present patterns do not have to be attacked before there can be any exploration for change. This not only saves time and channels mental effort into better directions but it also means that until a better idea is found the existing base is still valued.

It is easy to see why the clash system is so appealing. Negative criticism offers the opportunity for a great deal of apparent thinking. It is the refuge both of the mediocre mind and also - alas - of the

brilliant mind. The mediocre mind that is incapable of doing anything else finds criticism easy since it is one of the cheapest forms of thinking. By that I mean that you can criticize anything at all by just choosing a frame different from what you see. For example, if the designer has produced a simple chair you call it 'stark', 'boring', 'prison-like'. Now if the designer had produced a more elaborate chair you would just have shifted your frame of expectation and called it 'fussy', 'pretentious' and 'over-elaborate' (even 'vulgar').

So negative criticism offers an easy form of activity to mediocre minds. Unfortunately it also offers an attraction to brilliant minds, as mentioned earlier in the 'intelligence trap'. This is because it gives an immediate sense of both achievement and superiority. The tragedy is that so many of the more brilliant minds in Western civilization are trapped into this unconstructive mode. It is not as if there was such an ebullience of creative thinking around that we needed the critical thinkers to keep things from running wild. On the contrary, we need to make a great effort to develop design thinking, constructive thinking and creative thinking. I do not think there is really much chance of our educational establishments doing this.

There is more. Proving the other fellow wrong somehow proves us right. This really did apply with medieval theology but no longer does so today, for the real world is not a constructed theology. In the current idiom if you prove the other fellow wrong and he proves you wrong - you may indeed both be wrong.

Perhaps the most wasteful part of this negative idiom is the destruction of a good idea. An idea may be 90% right and 10% wrong (or inadequate). So what do our great thinkers do? Do they try to put that 10% right? No, they jump on the 10%, show up its inadequacy and then imply that anyone who could have put that forward must be an idiot and it therefore follows that the other 90% was thought up by an idiot and is therefore ridiculous.

OPV is another attention-directing tool designed to broaden perception. It is pronounced: 'O', 'P', 'V', or O.P.V. It is a simpler and more convenient tool for directing attention to the other people involved in a situation. The letters 'OPV stand for Other People's Views. In using the tool the thinker tries to put himself in the other person's shoes in order to look at the world from that position.

There are two parts to the exercise. The first part involves the identification of the other people who are really part of the situation. The second part involves getting into the 'shoes' of all these other people. For example, there is a rise in the price of basic farm produce. Do an OPV on this. This first part involves identifying such parties as farmers, wholesalers, retailers, food processors, food buyers, housewives, people in general, economists, government, etc. Then it is a matter of getting inside the thinking of each of these. For example, the retailer may be pleased because if he keeps his usual multiple of buying price for his selling price he will get more money. On the other hand, if people buy less or shift to another sort of food he may lose out. Food processors may suffer because of the increased price of the food they have to buy. On the other hand if people shift from fresh food to cheaper processed food the processor may benefit.

A toy company cited in a country town finds that it can only compete against imported toys if the prices of its products are kept within strict limits. The cost of living is pushing up wages, and the

workers ask for a wage rise in line with what workers in other industries are getting. The union supports this claim. An OPV might read as follows:

### ***Owners***

- If the plant has to be run at a loss it will be closed down.
- Management should be more productive and find new products.
- Money invested in property or government bonds would give a better rate of return.

### ***Manager***

- If the plant closes he will also be without work.
- For the owner to ask for new products is easier said than done, and what if they also meet price competition?
- For the owner to ask for productivity increases is also easier said than done and the last productivity drive has exhausted most possibilities.
- The workers must face the reality of the situation - either the factory stays in business or it does not.

### ***Workers***

- They need to live like everybody else - food and other costs have risen with inflation. A wage rise is essential.
- Profit margins should be cut for the time being.
- Management should do a better job of marketing and product design.
- The government should tax imports from cheap labour countries.

### ***Union officials***

- They are elected to represent the workers and must see they get a fair deal.
- An exception to proper wage rates in this one factory could spread across other factories and erode wages in general.
- The owner has a social responsibility since his workers helped him build up the business.
- Management should do a better job.
- Money can be borrowed to tide them over the difficult times.

### ***Families***

- More money is needed to feed the family.
- Is it really a toss-up between less money or no job at all?
- Is it time to start looking for a job elsewhere?
- Are things going to get better, or worse?
- Why don't the unions do a better job?
- A fair wage is due for a fair day's work.
- Is the threat of closure real or just a threat?
- The government should do something about cheap imports.

A fuller OPV might extend to the government (and protectionism), toy consumers in general, toy manufacturers and importers, Third World producers and so on.

Doing an OPV does *not* mean putting into the mouths of all parties sane and rational arguments of the sort one might hold oneself. Nor does it mean putting into their mouths complaints and irrationality in order to condemn their point of view. It means objectively trying to look at the world

from their point of view -and perhaps adding what is thought to be their actual point of view. In other words it is a blend between the 'position' point of view and the 'actual' point of view (for example, as a reporter might find it).

Unlike the APC (which was covered in an earlier section) the OPV does not involve just giving alternative points of view in general. The emphasis is first of all on specific people in specific positions and then a shift to their points of view. For exercise do an OPV on the following:

- 1 A child is dismissed from school for bullying.
- 2 A woman accuses her employers of discriminating against her because she is a woman.
- 3 A government official wants to retract a confidential piece of information he gave to a reporter.
- 4 The sales manager of a publicly owned company is told that bribery is essential for doing business in a particular country.
- 5 A youngster wants to smoke.
- 6 A big store is built just outside a small country town.

Imagine a boxing match for the world heavyweight championship. One of the fighters throws an uppercut. His opponent is knocked out. There is a new world champion.

In thinking that is to be followed by action there is usually someone who does something and someone else (or many others) who is affected by the action - as in the boxing match. In that match, however, there were many other people affected, not just the fighters. There were the spectators, there were the media (TV and newspapers), there were those who made bets, there was the next challenger, the promoters etc., etc. In the same way action can affect many other people apart from those directly concerned. So thinking about the action must also consider these other people. So the OPV is an important thinking tool.

The world is full of people. Thinking is done by people. Thinking affects people.

The two key questions are:

Who is affected by this thinking (action)?

What are the views (thinking) of those affected?

The OPV and values are very closely linked because the views of those affected are going to be determined by the values involved. So in doing an OPV we need to look closely at the values involved.

Can people look after their own values? They may not have the knowledge. The long-term consequences of building a dam in a certain place may be very complex. People may over-react out of ignorance or under-react. Future generations should also come into the OPV. They cannot be present to do their own thinking, so part of the OPV is on their behalf.

There is also long-term thinking and short-term thinking. A rise in food prices may be very unpopular in the short term. But long term this rise may benefit farmers who are motivated to produce more food, so eventually all benefit.

Keep in mind that the OPV is always concerned with what other people actually think at this moment - not with what they should think. Also an OPV is about the specific views of other people. You must put yourself in the shoes of these other people to think and feel as they do. The OPV is not just a matter of alternative views on the subject. It is views held by specific people.

The first step in doing an OPV is always to list the people affected. The second step is to imagine the views and thinking of each of these people (or groups). In some cases the list of people could extend almost for ever. As usual you have to be reasonable about this - there is no need always to consider even those who are only slightly affected.

## TWO SIDES IN AN ARGUMENT

One obvious use of the OPV is to consider the thinking of both sides in an argument or conflict. If you are on one side of the conflict, you make an effort to see things from the other side. This effort to see the other point of view or other perception of the situation must be objective. How do they see things?

money. Which girl does the winning ticket belong to? Do an OPV on this.

A boy likes to study listening to loud music. He does not want to use earphones. His parents and his sister like to work in peace and quiet. Do an OPV.

A ban is suggested on all cars and trucks at all times in the centre of the city. List all the people who are going to be affected by this ban (first part of an OPV).

While you are ill in bed your best friend goes off with your boyfriend (or girl-friend as appropriate). Do an OPV.

Your grandmother aged seventy-five wants to come and live with the family. Do an OPV for your father, mother, and other members of your family (the grandmother is your mother's mother).

A girl who wants to get her own way goes on a hunger strike and refuses to eat anything. Do an OPV.

There is an increase in local taxes to pay for better education. List all the people involved and do an OPV on their views.

The workers in a factory want an increase in wages because the cost of living has gone up. The management say they cannot increase wages because foreign competitors are lowering the price of the same products. Do an OPV on these opposing views.

## EXERCISES ON OPV

A beautiful tree in the garden next door grows bigger and bigger and finally cuts out the sunlight from the living room of your house. Do an OPV on the people involved. One day there is a great storm and the tree blows down, damaging your house. Do another OPV.

A girl gives some money to her friend to buy a lottery ticket. The friend buys two tickets. One of the tickets wins a great deal of money. Which girl does the winning ticket belong to? Do an OPV on this.

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