

dogs

First of all, I want us to talk about dogs. You may think this has little or nothing to do with Bylaws revision, but I hope that you will shortly see the connection.

Dogs. Everybody has well formed beliefs about dogs. What I'd like you to do is to tell me anything you believe to be true about dogs.

Dogs are smelly.

Dogs are loyal.

Dogs are fun.

Dogs are faithful.

Dogs scratch.

Dogs bite.

Dogs bark.

Dogs have fleas.

Here we have a set of belief statements about dogs. Now as most of you know, what we believe to be true about something and how we feel about something determine our attitudes towards that something.

An attitude is a predisposition to act. How we feel about dogs and what we believe about dogs determines our attitudes - that is, how we will act towards dogs.

If you have generally positive beliefs about dogs, your attitude is likely to be friendly. When you are next confronted by a large fluffy dog you are likely to pat it on the head and speak to it in friendly ways.

If you have generally negative beliefs about dogs, then your attitude is most likely to be antagonistic. When you are next confronted by a large hairy mutt you are likely to smack it on the nose and tell it to "Get off!"

The Bylaws Revision process is, at its very heart, an exercise in belief and attitude examination and challenge. "At heart, internationalization is more process than structure; it is an attitude. Structure is no substitute for spirit."⁽¹⁾ And psychologists remind us that beliefs and attitudes are, in adults, very rigidly formed. This is one of the reasons that change is so difficult for us to bear, and to implement. Whenever we challenge someone's belief there is a resistance almost beyond explanation. We can observe this phenomenon in our normal management life. It is relatively easy to change schedules and budgets for a fundraising idea like the 40 Hour Famine (rather too easy usually). It is somewhat harder to change a goal or objective (like a goal to raise \$10 million in the 1986 40 Hour Famine). It is even more difficult to change a purpose statement or a mission statement (such as "World Vision is a Christian humanitarian aid agency reaching out to the poorest of the poor in the Name of Jesus Christ"). It is immensely difficult to change underlying beliefs and attitudes (such as a belief that "the money never gets there" or "the poor are lazy").

I am going through this elaborate routine of undergraduate psychology to remind us of an essential factor that we must try to face as honestly and objectively as we can. Reviewing this grand experiment, the international partnership, is forcing us to re-examine our

¹ Report of the Internationalization Study Committee, p.10, 1976.

underlying beliefs about what World Vision is, and more particularly beliefs about who is in charge. Examining our beliefs is difficult, painful, and, at the very least, unsettling.

Before I suggest some of these beliefs to you, let me remind you of the process through which we have gone since last August.

In September I spent the best part of the week here at the international office, meeting with individuals, WVI Board members, and WVI Board committees. After that week, I wrote the two documents which have become known as the Bylaws Green Papers and circulated them widely for reactions.

I received basically two kinds of reactions, and basically from two sources.

Those with whom I consulted responded to the Green Papers directly, with suggestions, clarifications, and expressions of unease about one or more directions implied in the papers.

The people I had not consulted before writing the Green Papers, namely the support offices, did not respond to the papers directly at all, but rather, tended to suggest that the "real" problem was not being addressed by the papers. I believe this "real" problem is a problem of beliefs and values mismatch. We do not all believe the same things about what the partnership is, nor what it ought to be.

To help you think about this, here are some images (at the IAC, these diagrams were transferred to wall posters in a professional manner by Christopher Radley).

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Now, when I discussed the partnership with the support offices I tended to get a perspective like this - The Triangle Perspective. Of course, this is an oversimplification, but I think it expresses something like what I have heard from quite a few support office sources. Their perception, and please note I am using the word "perception", I am not making a value judgment about truth or reality. I am merely trying to help you picture what I believe is a real point of view. Their perception is that the partnership today is a triangle with the international office dominating both the support offices and the field offices.

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Around the same time I was getting responses from various folk at the international office. Whenever they attempted to draw the partnership they, without a single exception, drew the international office in the middle. Some emphasized the facilitating and coordinating nature of this position. And most drew complex inter-relationships apart from the spokes of the wheel. One response placed this shape within a circle of donors.

One perspective we did not get, and this is itself very instructive to me, is the direct field point of view. As far as I am aware, no-one copied the Green Papers to any field director, and in any case, I received no response from one, although input was received from two regional vice presidents. Therefore it is hard for me to represent the field point of view with any accuracy. However, one can show you the support office's perspective of the field office's perspective. Shall I say that again?

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The support offices seemed to be suggesting that the fields could hardly see the support offices, and vice versa, because there, dominating their horizon was a familiar megalith - the international office.

One should say a word in passing about the lack of field perspective. It is apposite to note that one of the common statements of a desirable outcome from the Bylaws review process is that field offices will be better represented. The way in which we have handled this process to date is, in my view, a clear demonstration of our beliefs about the place of the field in the partnership and our attitudes towards the field. I am concerned about what this reveals about my own personal beliefs and attitudes, and I am repentant for them.

And so we come to Perth - home of the America's Cup. The Bylaws Committee took the approach that it would try to cast its collective mind back to those halcyon days of the mid-70s when we were struggling together in one of World Vision's most ambitious endeavours, namely the creation of an international partnership. The committee asked itself, "What did we intend in the beginning?"

It was helpful to recall the words of the declaration of internationalization. The intention was "to structure a more realistic and functional partnership between the several national entities"; and "to effectuate a closer and more productive unity between the several vital components of World Vision."

The committee concluded that we had in mind a partnership between the support entities and the field entities. We defined it in the following way:

The partnership is a coming together, with integrity and accountability, on a complementary basis, of **field** and **support** entities, sharing different but equal roles in the one ministry of Christ to the poor, for the purpose of enhancing the quality and cost effectiveness of this ministry.

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One particularly useful image, given to us by Dean John Rymer, is this one. If, as the definition above implies, the support offices and the field offices are the elements of the partnership, then the international office may be thought of as the good oil which makes it possible. It is an essential third element in the machinery, but its nature is essentially different. It is, as all of us say in words very often, a facilitator. Not the actual machine, nor the fuel which makes it go, but the facilitating lubricant of encouragement and enabling which makes movement possible.

It is perhaps unfortunate, and also indicative of the way we think about beliefs (or don't think about beliefs), that the Perth Report contains little of what I have been talking about so far, but rather emphasizes the structure which the committee envisaged as flowing naturally from the beliefs which we interpreted as having been embodied in the original intentions of the internationalization process.

As far as the committee is concerned, this is not a fait accompli. These are "green paper" ideas. This is work in progress. For myself, I will not be in the least offended to hear that the committee is out of step with one or all of you. This is the purpose of bringing this work in progress to the IAC.

Here are some questions for us to think about:

Are the basic beliefs on which the committee is operating correct?

Is the general direction of the Bylaws Review Committee correct?

To what extent does the structure being suggested by the committee flow naturally from these beliefs and direction? Where is it off target?

Before we start our discussion allow me to remind you of some encouraging words said by a former president back in 1976.

I want "to caution us against locking ourselves into relationships or structures that will make us outdated and ineffective in a few years as we face changing world conditions and new opportunities for ministry. I believe we want to plan not to become, as some movements have, another missionary anachronism. Thus I believe we want to remain flexible, allowing opportunity for experimentation with new forms of ministry and partnership (my emphasis), leaving room for further revelations of the Holy Spirit as we have capacity and understanding to receive them."²)

² Dr Stan Mooneyham, Opening Address to the Joint Boards Meeting in Hawaii, April 1976.