

# **Creative Problem Solving Processes and Social Change: An Executive Summary of Cliff's 1993 Master's Project**

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## Introduction

Cliff's (1993) research was an interpretive and descriptive qualitative study. She chose to analyze the conceptual relationship between the theory and practice of the CPS process (Isaksen & Treffinger, 1987) and the nonviolent social change processes of Gandhi (Bondurant, 1971) and King Jr. (The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc., 1989,1990) as complementary social technologies.

## Pertinent Background

A good case was made for the significance of the research. For example, the findings could assist CPS to develop a technology that would address itself to solve people problems. Research, theory building and development of the CPS process had failed to make connections to political, social and economic issues. As Osborn (1963) noted, "... alas, the newest and most pressing problems of our nation are not so much the improvement of things as the solution to people-problems, there is no conscious effort at all comparable to what scientific research is doing with the products we use"(p. 5). Cliff (1963) noted that significant challenges awaited the CPS as a technology for implementation in the social arena (p. 3). She pointed out that to meet the challenge of the employment of CPS to solve people problems, explicit theoretical development was needed.

The purpose of the research was to expand approaches to social technology to create a bridge for using Creative Problem Solving to solve people problems. The research focused on

four important questions

1. What are the definitional, structural, and operational relationships between the Creative Problem Solving model of Isaksen & Treffinger and the nonviolent social change technologies of Gandhi and King?
2. What similarities and differences exist among these processes that would strengthen their explicit use in theory and practice of Creative Problem Solving?
3. What are the implications for the Creative Problem Solving process as a technology to assist in strengthening current nonviolent social change processes?
4. What are the implications for the current nonviolent social technologies to assist in strengthening the Creative Problem Solving process?

A conceptual framework that was derived from the research questions brought together the constructs that were identified by the investigator. Miles & Huberman (1994) explained that a conceptual framework “explains either graphically or in narrative form, the main dimensions to be studied—the key factors, or variables and the presumed relations among them”(p. 18). The conceptual framework was useful in data collection and in analyzing the relationships between the non-violent social change processes of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Creative Problem Solving Process. Goetz & LeCompte (1984) explained the value of conceptualization as follows: “Clear conceptualization of research design and activity is crucial to the legitimacy of individual research reports, to the development of lines of inquiry, to the training of competent researchers, and to the communication among scholars that produces any science”(pp. 61-62).

### Method

The research described and analyzed the relationships between the Creative Problem Solving process of Isaksen and Treffinger and the lived experiences of Gandhi and Martin Luther

King, to effect social change. The method was well suited for achieving the purpose of the study. The study made use of document analysis. The sources of data used for the study were (a) Creative Problem Solving process model of Isaksen & Treffinger, 1987, (b) the non-violent social change process of Gandhi (Bondurant, 1971) and King's process (The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc., 1989, 1990). The data were useful to generate a theory. Denzin (1998) recognized the value of data in qualitative research. He stated, "...Staying close to the data is the most powerful means of telling the story just as in a dance the story is told through the body itself"(p. 47).

Creative Analysis (Samson, 1966, Upton, 1961, Upton, Samson & Farmer, 1978) was applied to code, sort, analyze data and present findings. Structural Analysis was effectively used to identify part/whole relationships within each process. Semantic Analysis was useful to identify key words, phrases and their qualities within and among all the three processes and Operational Analysis seemed appropriate to identify and describe the steps within the creative problem solving processes. Constant comparisons were made to examine definitions, structure and operations within and across the processes.

### Findings

The findings indicated that all three processes contained structural component equivalents and steps/stages. However, there were three components in the CPS and the social change process of Gandhi whereas there were two components in the Kingian social change process. The stages in the Creative Problem Solving process were distributed in a 3/1/2 format, whereas the steps in the Gandhi an social change process were equally distributed with nine each and the steps in the Kingian social change process were equally distributed with six each. The deliberate, continuous phases in the Creative Problem Solving process was its unique feature. There were

more structural differences among the three processes than were similarities. The differences related to the aspect of deliberateness. The Creative Problem Solving process was more deliberate theoretically than were the nonviolent social change processes of Gandhi and King when applied to the domain of whole/part relationships of Structural Analysis. The unique feature of the Creative Problem Solving process was the two deliberately name phases of divergence and convergence. All the three models had steps and stages.

The social change process of Gandhi had Rules/ Code and Steps and the social change process of King had Principles and Steps equivalent to the component structure in the Creative Problem Solving model. Neither the Rules/Code and Steps of Gandhi or the Principles and Steps of King were evident in the Creative Problem Solving process. Although there was evidence of the existence of an explicit philosophy in the Kingian nonviolent social change process, there was implicit philosophical development in the Gandhian nonviolent Satyagraha movement and the Creative Problem Solving process model.

#### Suggestions for Further Model Development

The suggestions were as follows: (a) the development of a philosophical entry point for all three processes; (b) further phase development for a nonviolent social change process model; (c) the use of a model that visually represents the nonviolent social change processes of Gandhi and King; and (d) further research and development of these baseline models to increase their accessibility as social technologies.

#### Implications

The implications related to explicit philosophical /ethical development of the Creative Problem Solving process to assist in the development of Creative Problem Solving as a social technology. Additionally, there were suggestions for initiating investigations of problem- solving

processes outside the domain of creativity, for further model development of nonviolent social change processes, examination of phases within other process models, and a comparison of tools and techniques of the CPS process to tools and techniques used in nonviolent social change processes.

### Conclusion

Cliff's attempt to explore the Creative Problem Solving model and the non-violent social change processes of Gandhi and King Jr. for the development of a model to solve people-problems was commendable. She highlighted the need for the use of CPS beyond the boundaries of education, business and industry. Furthermore, her attempt to step out of cultural boundaries to analyze the social change process of Gandhi was also commendable. Future research in creativity could explore nonviolent social change processes in diverse cultural settings to arrive at the development of a model for social change that better matches Osborn's previously stated vision for use of the Creative Problem Solving process.

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