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Introduction

No problem can be solved by the same consciousness that created it.

—Albert Einstein

Scientists are further beginning to recognize that—like the artificial conflict between spirit and nature, between woman and man, and between different races, religions, and ethnic groups fostered by the dominator mentality—the way we view conflict itself needs to be reexamined.

—Riane Eisler (1987)

This book introduces a new, collaborative action methodology called synergic inquiry (SI) for both investigating and effecting transformative change among individuals and collectives. This methodology is a formalization of the very means by which it was created. It was formalized into methodology so that it could be shared with others and explored more widely.

In this opening chapter, we begin by presenting a perspective on current issues and their root causes, which provides a rationale for understanding the intent of SI. Then, we situate SI in the context of research to discuss the distinctive contributions that SI makes as a methodology. We also describe the structure of the book to help orient readers. Finally, we end with a brief account of the history of SI.

Worldly Violence, Primary Causes, and the Root Problem

Our world is full of violence. This violence begins within each of us. We have multiple forces within us that are colliding with each other, causing us pain, agony, and misery. Further, external complexities in our personal as well as professional lives also affect the intricate internal dynamics between these multiple forces. These external demands and struggles can easily overwhelm us, causing a sense of crisis of personal identity and growth (Kegan, 1994).

The violence we experience in our inner world manifests itself in our outer world. At the relationship level, we have yet to learn how to relate to each other without violence. Our internal reactions to significant external changes tend to disrupt our relationships. In our relationships with our lovers and friends, we tend either to lose our own sense of self, to dominate the other, or to compromise our senses of self and others. These dynamics leave us confused and afraid of each other (Johnston, 1991). Our dealings in groups suffer in similar ways. We rarely know how to work well together and do not truly know how to collaborate. Team efforts are often undermined by competition or domination between members of the team, and group decisions tend to be compromises rather than creative solutions that use the strengths and insights of all involved (Katzenback & Smith, 1993; Lipnack & Stamps, 1993; Mouton & Blake, 1984; Reddy, 1988). These violent symptoms continue outward to the organizational level, where we cultivate organizational cultures that crush individual differences and exploit individual egos for organizational success (Kanter, 1983; Senge, 1990). Or organizations exist without a sense of a cohesive whole because they are so full of conflicts and confrontations (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967).

At the levels of community and society, we find these same kinds of problems repeated in racism, sexism, and other forms of exploitation, exclusion, and intolerance that are widespread throughout the world (Eisler, 1987). People of one race or belief exclude, beat, and even kill people of other races and those who are different. Those who are on the receiving end of this tend to do the same to others, as shown in the horrible struggles between the United States and Muslim extremists, between Whites and Blacks and other minorities in the United States, between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East, and between Palestinians and Indians in the Near East, between the Chinese and the Tibetans in the Far East, and so forth. These "isms" between different groups also tend to cause a superficial feeling of unity among members within each constituency, which does not respect human differences. Instances of violence are also extended beyond global boundaries in subtle and yet profound ways. We seem to suffer from egocentrism (in which we believe that we are the only right

group) or ethnocentrism (in which we believe our group is better than others' groups) (Adler, 1997), and these incompatible beliefs lead to historic imperialism of one culture over others, as happened with the European domination over Africans, Asians, and other people in other parts of the world (Ani, 1994).

The violence does not stop at the human realm. It expands itself to the ecological realm. The human domination over nature is leading to the kinds of severe breakdown that scientists call entropy, and the living system of earth's biosphere seems to be taking a road toward deterioration and inexorable death (Harman, 1994). Warnings from those who study these problems have even taken the form of a statement from a group consisting of 1,680 scientists from 70 countries around the globe, including 104 Nobel laureates, saying that humanity is on a course of self-destruction (Union of Concerned Scientists, 1992).

What are the sources for these divergent forms of violence within each of us, for all of us, and the whole ecology of us? After pondering this for many years, what came to us is that each of us, all of us, and the whole ecology of us suffer from one paramount incapacity: our inability to engage differences in ways that are harmonious, creative, and transformative. Differences in each of the realms are often turned into polarities, and these in turn polarize our relationships with each other and the ecological world in which we live. It is those polarizations that catalyze varied forms of violence in our individual lives, social and organizational lives, and ecological lives.

The futurist, Charles M. Johnston (1991), developed a marvelous framework that helps illuminate the underlying causes for these problematic symptoms. In his framework, he identifies three major human errors—separation fallacy, unity fallacy, and compromise fallacy—in our business of dealing with differences and polarities. Separation fallacy simply means that differences are polarized to the extent that one is fully differentiated from others. In addition, separation fallacy associates a positive value to one end of the pole. "Our modern defining of such things as objective and subjective, human kind and nature, masculine and feminine as distinct has made not just a statement about difference, but as well about where 'real' truth ultimately lies" (Johnston, 1991, p. 35). When this happens, "mind remains separate from body, matter from energy, moral from immoral. East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet" (Johnston, 1991, p. 35).

In contrast, unity fallacy refers to the human tendency to be incapable of or unwilling to differentiate the self from others. In the name of searching for oneness, unity, or sameness, differences between self and other and part and whole are either unseen or framed as unimportant. If the separation fallacy is the pendulum swinging to the left, unity fallacy is the pendulum swinging to the right.

The compromise fallacy is the idea that the pendulum must be somewhere in the middle. In the world of self meeting others, boundaries are colliding to the extent that everyone loses some by gaining some. This idea does not lead to the extremity that either the unity fallacy or the separation fallacy does, nor does it work with differences and polarities to the extent that uniqueness is being leveraged. It confuses "integration with some additive middle ground. Rather than revealing the rich spectrum of colors that lies beyond black and white, they lead us to conclude that reality simply shows varying shades of gray" (Johnston, 1991, p. 38).

It is our belief that these fallacies are the primary causes of all forms of violence in our social and ecological realms. In addition, we also believe that most people individually suffer from one or more forms of these fallacies. These fallacies also exist in our social collectives. They constitute a matrix of dynamic interactions that affect us both internally as well as externally.

A common theme penetrating these fallacies is an either-or mentality that leads to a power-over dynamic. It is either I win or you win, or we both win a bit by losing some. The perspective is further confirmed by the work of Riane Eisler (1987)—the futurist and activist—on gender relations. In her internationally acclaimed book, *The Chalice and the Blade,* she posits that underlying the great surface diversity of human culture there exists the dominator model, which is about "the ranking of one half of humanity over the other" (p. xvii). In our history, people took on this dominator model, which caused social and ecological perils. As quoted in the opening of the chapter, scientists are further beginning to recognize that—like the artificial conflict between spirit and nature, between woman and man, and between different races, religions, and ethnic groups fostered by the dominator mentality—the way we view conflict itself needs to be reexamined.

Yet it is also our belief that there is something deeper and more fundamental and alarming than these important causes for our violence in our social and ecological lives. This has to do with a root problem that seems to reach at the core of our challenges: That is, we seem to suffer from a fundamental pathology in the way we mythize or spiritualize the world. We share Raimon Panikkar's (1979) belief that our most basic crisis is one of myth. Basically, we seem to suffer from the pathological belief that reality is fundamentally stable, ultimately definable, and fully knowable. There is one truth, and we will try to get it right. Then, when we find out that we have different beliefs and perspectives, violence against each other occurs.

For us, the discussion just recounted leads to a critical realization. We do not believe that these varied forms of violence arise of themselves, nor do we believe they come from inherent human evil or the perversity of the physical world. Our experience with SI substantiates the statement by Albert Einstein

used at the beginning of this chapter. From our point of view, we cannot solve our problems as long as we stay locked within the pathological belief within which these violent problems were created. The underlying root cause for our ever-increasing problems is the pathology that exists in our own individual and collective consciousnesses.

The pathology at our mythical level, manifested as the dominator model in the form of the three major fallacies, imposes heavily on our ability to learn from, accept feedback from, and respond effectively to the challenges and opportunities that we now face. As a species, humans could well be diagnosed as learning challenged. That is to say, we do not even know how to learn to transform the deep-rooted pathology that causes the kinds of problems and crises we now face.

Indeed, our time calls for a new, refreshing perspective to approach the crises we face, one that reexplains the world (Thompson, 1991). Such a new approach has to be able to transform the pathology in our consciousnesses and expand capacities so that we can think anew and relate to each other differently in social and ecological contexts to make a difference for everyone. As the poet and activist Audre Lorde so powerfully expresses, "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."

The SI methodology grew out of the need and the desire to do just this, to learn how to transform and expand individual and collective consciousness by drawing on our individual and cultural diversity as sources of wisdom rather than of friction. It was developed and refined to help us reframe and reassess the richness within our diversity and learn to solve problems collaboratively, creatively, efficiently, and effectively by moving us beyond barriers of culture, training, knowledge, status, and belief. We present this methodology in hopes that it can be used to help you collectively enhance your capacities to work with the problems of varied proportions that cut across national and cultural boundaries to affect all of our lives.

Synergic Inquiry and Purposes of SI

SI was created in response to the problems that resulted from our inability to engage in differences that challenge all parts of our lives—our work and educational lives; our personal and professional relationships; our leadership, business, and community lives; and our diversity issues and cross-cultural interactions. Many new approaches have been developed to deal with these problems. But it seems that solutions have always come from the same two places—out of the mindsets that created the problems or out

of their polar opposites. As a result, the solutions often end up not being effective or causing more problems than they solve.

SI is inspired to be a qualitatively different approach. Coming out of the notion of synergy—identified by us as a grand pattern underlying the evolution of the universe—it is a methodology that attempts to enhance human creativity and harmony through the way it addresses problems and crises. It is developed to break open the three major human fallacies by expanding human consciousnesses and capacities.

SI is a collaborative, action-oriented methodology that cultivates our capacities for problem solving, conflict resolution, learning, and growth through transforming and expanding human consciousnesses. SI does this by means of the unique way in which it focuses on and uses differences. Within SI, differences are not regarded as sources of friction and conflict; they are used for the wisdom inherent in them and the learning they can promote. The methodology allows people with differences—be they differences in personality, learning style, status, or culture—to come into the same process with equality and fairness. Developed to creatively use differences to help us make a difference for ourselves and the world, SI creates a container to hold all who engage in it and invites their participation.

Over the years, SI has been applied to contexts as varied as individual development, relationship enhancement, conflict resolution, team development, organizational development and transformation, community development, and racial, ethnic, and gender differences. There have been cross-cultural applications in China, Mexico, India, and the United States.

With our intention to uphold our vision and desire for helping make a fundamental shift for our societies, SI works within the four levels of our individual and collective lives—the mental, the social, the political, and the spiritual:

1. *Mental: Fostering synergic capacity for resilience, adaptability, and change.* SI is designed to help develop and actualize human potential. It does this by facilitating expansion of participants' consciousness and capacities for transformative change. It intends to have participants learn to embody a process through which they can continually expand themselves on their own future journeys.

2. *Social: Solving problems for social systems of various levels and complexities.* On the social level, SI enables participants to identify and use differences creatively. In the process, inclusivity, motivation, and performance are increased. Thus, SI fosters creativity for solving social and organizational problems.

3. *Political: Transforming power relationships in ways that enable humans to flourish.* SI is designed to transform adversity into synergy so that all can benefit. In this way, it addresses fundamental causes for social alienation, injustice, oppression, and domination and enhances equity, justice, and harmony.

4. *Spiritual: Aligning self with the evolutionary pattern of the universe.* Crystallized from our understanding about how the universe evolves, SI is a process that expands the normal egoistic self to seek out the spiritual connection of oneself to the larger whole. We believe that the power of SI lies in this ultimate spiritual intention.

Features of SI

There are several features of SI that distinguish it from traditional research methodologies. These include its orientation toward action and collaboration, its ability to transform consciousness; and its view of research as a living quest, a balance between theory and practice, and an intention that is ultimately spiritual.

Following the emphasis in Plato and Aristotle on pure knowledge and pure truth, traditional research focuses on generating knowledge for the sake of knowledge itself (Harman, 1996; Heron, 1996; Reason, 1994, 1996). Research in general, and science in particular, have been kept as privileged disciplines in which researchers and scholars develop objective knowledge about the world (Reason, 1988, 1994, 1996). The knowledge generated by this kind of research is usually not accessible to the general public. Even when the general public does have access to it, the forms and contents of this research do not make much sense to the general populace.

In contrast, SI fosters research as a way of life, empowering humans of all cultures to learn, grow, and expand. Research is no longer a privileged discipline controlled by traditional academies. It treats research as a living quest for learning, growth, collective problem solving, and even spiritual development. It generates subjective knowledge and collective human processes that are catalytic for transformative changes. The knowledge SI develops from human action will be poignant and directly applicable for participants. Because any knowledge with use must have both consequences and efficacy, this method is designed to help participants take learnings and new awareness into their own actions and behaviors and use them productively.

Traditional research also separates the researcher from the researched. Whereas the researcher has power over design strategy, data analysis, and report writing, the researched does not have much say, either in terms of the research process or in terms of its outcomes (Heron, 1996; Reason, 1988, 1994, 1996). In sharp contrast, SI is highly collaborative. It breaks down barriers and power differentials between researcher and researched. Everybody participates in the whole process of research, and everyone is empowered to integrate new knowledge into actions at both the individual

and collective levels. Each participant is both researcher and researched, or both object and subject; research is *for, by,* and *with* people. In this way SI joins in the powerful sentiment expressed by Peter Reason (1988, 1994) and John Heron (1996), and it belongs to participative schools of inquiry, such as cooperative inquiry, action inquiry, and participatory action research.

SI was developed to help at various human system levels because we firmly believe that the fundamental pathology also exists in every social system level, and every system suffers from one or more forms of fallacies. Therefore, for us the only fundamental solution to all social and ecological predicaments is to expand consciousness at all possible human system levels.

SI transforms consciousness by building in reflective practices that help in examining the underlying premises of one's own presuppositions, assumptions, values, and beliefs. In contrast, most traditional research approaches are not transformative. They tend to focus on generating knowledge for objective and external purposes, without active processes that reflect on one's own consciousness.

SI also maintains a careful balance between theory and practice. Most traditional research generates knowledge or theories and has little to no interest in guiding practices. The result is that most traditional research is difficult to apply to the issues and problems people actually face, and most practitioners lack an adequate theoretical foundation and their research outcomes are not designed to reflect back onto the methodological framework itself. Inspired by theorist Kurt Lewin's position that "there is nothing so practical as a good theory," SI inherently maintains balance between theory and practice in two different ways. First, SI has a solid theoretical foundation. It has a theoretical framework underlying its methodological processes and steps: its solidity within, identified by us as universal domains through what Gregory Bateson (1979) called a pattern that connects, as well as its definition and description of consciousness and its dimensions. Further, a product of continuing theorizing and practicing, the outcomes of SI research are used to reflect on and improve the theoretical and the methodological.

SI also maintains a balance between theory and practice through the ways in which new insight or awareness learned about the self or others becomes living theory for living action. Participants apply their new awareness within the inquiry itself and use the new awareness to develop new skills and capacities for action. Although this localized kind of theory does not have the generalizability of a grand or metatheory, it is certainly a good use of theory for the participants themselves.

Finally, and most ambitiously, SI has what some would call a spiritual intention, that of facilitating the evolution of human consciousness. The mental, social, and political purposes just outlined are all informed by this

spiritual core. Underlying SI is the principle that we recognize that, in its essence, the universe itself evolves. The universe unfolds its mystery in ways that tend to go beyond any human action and imagination. This principle is used to guide both human practice of SI and the development of the methodology itself to facilitate the evolution of human consciousness to access more of this mysterious universe.

The spiritual dimension of science and research is beginning to be noted by research methodologists. A champion of this front, Peter Reason (1993), argues that science is sacred and has a spiritual character. Building on this theme propounded by Reason, the position is forcefully elaborated by Lincoln (1995):

> The spiritual, or sacred, side of science emerges from a profound concern for human dignity, justice, and interpersonal respect. The sacredness in the enterprise of science issues from the collaborative and egalitarian aspects of the relationships created in the research-to-action continuum. Researchers who conceive of science in this way make space for the life ways of others and create relationships that are based not on unequal power, but on mutual respect, granting of dignity, and deep appreciation of the human condition. (p. 284)

We would like to extend this position further. It is our belief that the very attention that informs science and research, and thus human action, is spiritual. This is what links both science and human action to the mythical dimension of reality (Panikkar, 1979; Vachon, 1995) or the sacredness of reality (Reason, 1993). Taking to heart the quotation by Albert Einstein used earlier, we use SI in an attempt to help people to continually grow beyond the limitations of their own consciousnesses. In other words, SI was designed to help facilitate the evolution of consciousness by enabling us, as participants, to consciously integrate ever-larger evolutionary patterns into ourselves.

Structure of This Book

The purpose of this book is to introduce this new methodology so that it may be used more widely to address both the questions and the problems that people face. The book is divided into two basic parts: methodology and theory and SI practices. Part I, "The SI Methodology and Its Theoretical Foundation" (Chapters 2–4), explicates SI in terms of its methodological framework, theoretical foundation, and relationship to other research paradigms and methodologies. Detailed descriptions of the processes and phases, with tools and exercises for guiding practice, are also given. Part II, "SI

Practices" (Chapters 5–16), provides guidance for potential SI practitioners and case studies. In our concluding chapter (Chapter 16), we reflect on these cases and explore implications for future research.

In Part I, Chapter 2, "Overview of Synergic Inquiry," the basic premises on which SI is based are described, and an overview of the methodology is presented. For those who wish to seriously consider analyzing or using SI as a research or change methodology, Chapters 3 and 4 are especially important. Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical foundation on which SI is developed. It presents the argument for a universal principle—the synergy principle—drawing from various sources of cultural wisdoms, social sciences, and natural sciences. Chapter 4 places this methodology in the context of other research paradigms and change methodologies. These provide a wider context from which to understand the uniqueness of SI in the larger context of research paradigms and methodologies for change and transformation.

Part II, Chapter 5 describes how to get started, and some of the major issues that arise from using SI are addressed. Chapters 6–15 are a collection of case studies. These give a more concrete picture of the scope of SI and its applications. They range from the level of the individual and personal relationships through the group level to that of organizations. Intersecting these levels are such issues as personal development, team development, organizational development, conflict resolution, racism, sexism, and cross-cultural synergy.

The case studies include one by an individual demonstrating how she uses SI to embody change in the nature of her being and the foundations of her behavior. Another presents a husband and wife who synergize with each other to uncover the sources of friction and address a longstanding logistic problem. A third shows how family members use synergy to uncover layers of selves and to move beyond the conventional explanations of intergenerational conflict to simultaneously strengthen family ties and encourage the independence of a child approaching adulthood.

At the level of the group, cases demonstrate the use of SI to forestall conflict and allow forward movement with vision and plans, to solve a previously intractable collective problem, and to address issues between Blacks and Whites in a way that enables the Black subgroup to come to grips with previously invisible differences among themselves and the White subgroup to delve more deeply than usual into the cultural foundations of their beliefs and behavior. Other studies include a case in which a group was formed specifically to use SI as a workshop addressing gender issues between men and women and one in which a teacher in a high school with a diverse student body uses SI as a new pedagogy.

At the organizational level, one chapter demonstrates the application of SI to management practices in a business in China in which synergy created

between U.S. and Chinese approaches to business helps improve the organization's performance. In the process, important differences in approach to organizational and cultural expectations of employees become visible. Another organizational case study shows SI being used to help a U.S. organization deal with its start-ups in Mexico: The heavy impact of the unrecognized cultural and historical issues behind these problems is brought to the surface in such a way that revitalization for the whole organization emerges out of this SI intervention.

In our concluding chapter, we reflect on these SI cases from our own perspectives and interpretations. The central themes as well as the interesting particularities of these cases are discussed. The implications of SI work for future of research are also explored.

A Brief History of SI

Synergic inquiry was initiated and led by Yongming Tang with many people contributing to its development. It was born out of Yongming's painful struggles to make sense of experiences in graduate school in the United States, without rejecting the Chinese culture in which he had been raised and educated. He wanted to find a means by which he could live productively, if not always harmoniously, in both Chinese and U.S. worlds.

Yongming eventually did find a way to use these experiences to expand his understanding and thinking. Seeing the range of benefits this approach brought him as an individual, he wondered if it would be possible to bring these same kinds of benefits to an organization. Dissertation research on transferring management models from European and U.S. cultures to China led him to strive for ways that might allow Chinese organizations to experiment with Western ideas differently. Would it be possible for Chinese organizations to synergize these ideas with their own existing beliefs, practices, and culture, rather than merely trying to adopt the foreign as "new and better" and ending up with negative outcomes?

In the process of exploring synergy in relation to organizations, Yongming came across Nancy Adler's (1997) cultural synergy process for problem solving in multicultural organizations. In this work, she outlines a process involving two phases: differentiation of different cultural perspectives and then their subsequent integration. This process provided the initial framework for what is now called synergic inquiry.

Because we did not yet know how to differentiate and how to integrate as groups, the first project is best described as a chaotic experience. It took place in China and, after a brief introductory session in the United States,

began with lectures and a tour of Beijing to introduce a Chinese perspective to the U.S. team. This was followed by a 30-hour train ride to a remote community in northern China, where the business was located. Once there, our hosts did not know how to receive us, and we, as a group, did not know how to relate to them.

Everyone was overwhelmed by the cultural differences, and there was no formal process to help with integration and learning. The U.S. team did manage to organize itself, conduct interviews, and observe the lives and work of their Chinese counterparts. More important were efforts to make sure that both the Chinese and the U.S. teams had as many as possible of the kinds of experiences Yongming had found so beneficial for himself. The Americans readily immersed themselves in the differences they found in China. They played and toured together. They visited people's homes, conducted interviews, and argued and discussed endlessly. In the end, a talk was organized so that some of the executives and managers could listen to the Americans report on how Western management approaches might effectively be used to improve their situation. Then the project ended.

Everything was so extremely hectic that Yongming had doubts that any real benefits at all could come out of such a project. Despite the wealth of exciting ideas that were developed, he wondered whether the Chinese would actually be able to use them. Or would these too be treated the way that ideas from the West were usually treated in China? Remaining in China after the project, he was told that those who had intensely interacted with the team from the United States felt that they had learned a lot.

Some of these learnings had to do with their cultural stereotypes: Their views about Americans had changed. Others talked about how they had been personally transformed by their experiences with the U.S. team and about how these transformations would now enable them to try using the new ideas in practice.

Back in the United States, there was a team retreat for reflection and closure. Because the whole project had been so "messy" by the standards of Yongming's training as a consultant, he was prepared for some very stiff criticism from participants. To his surprise the team members talked about how much this brief experience affected their lives. Participants felt that the experience had been extraordinarily transformative, and the amount of gratitude they expressed was overwhelming. These responses energized Yongming so much that he began to formalize the activities of this project into what became the core of the SI methodology.

Into this Yongming fed all that he had learned as a Chinese man immersed in the U.S. culture, drawing on his personal experiences with culture shock and his scholarly background in systems theory and evolutionary

processes. Able to draw on his formal Western organizational and systems theory training and to integrate it with his knowledge of Eastern philosophy and dialectics, as well as with his early training in biological processes, he worked toward developing a formal theoretical model and a formal structure of activities to go with this model. The combination of experience and learning, input and feedback provided the ideal set of circumstances for the development of synergic inquiry.

In the spring of 1995, Charles Joiner and Susan Cannon, who had participated in the first synergy project, used the tentatively formed process of SI to address problems between an organization in the United States called World SHARE and its affiliates in Mexico. World SHARE is an international nonprofit organization devoted to stimulating community development and self-help projects in low-income communities. World SHARE's affiliates in Mexico had been failing in their mission, and, as a member of the board of directors, Charles Joiner proposed using SI to address these problems more creatively.

A team of five faculty members and students from the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) was matched with a team of three leaders in World SHARE's Mexico project to form a core synergy team. The corporate president, three vice presidents, and the purchasing staff participated in this project as well. After preparatory work, the team spent 2 weeks visiting World SHARE affiliate sites in Mexico, and an additional 4 days were spent with corporate leaders.

One result of this work was total reorganization of the strategy and design of World SHARE's work in Mexico, with a culturally appropriate form being created for that effort. The board also reorganized the corporation as a whole, and there was a wholesale redesign of World SHARE's work internationally. This led to a revitalization of the organization as a whole and personal growth and change for participants in the inquiry (see Chapter 15).

With two successful projects under his belt, Yongming was able to rally support from the Chinese government, intellectuals, and business executives to use SI to search for new organizational forms for China, ones that would transcend the limitations of the systems in both Chinese and Western cultures. Yifu Yin, a professor in China, and Mr. Song, the CEO of Beijing New Building Materials (BNBM), invited Yongming to conduct an SI project with BNBM in the summer of 1995.

BNBM, a successful state-owned enterprise with 2,000 employees, produces new construction materials for the Asian markets. The company had an unusual amount of autonomy to develop a new organizational form that would fit the global market economy. Both the company and the government were looking for a new company system, one that would retain essential

elements of socialism, while matching the needs of the fiercely competitive global economy.

In July, a group of 10 students and faculty members from CIIS spent 3 weeks in Beijing working with a complementary group of 11 key managers from the company (see Chapter 14). Organized into three teams—leadership, the human dimension, and marketing and technology—made up of people from both CIIS and BNBM, they interviewed BNBM employees, observed work settings, and went through the synergy process. At the end of the 3 weeks, each team had developed a series of recommendations to BNBM senior leadership.

All of the applications of SI to this point were at the organizational level. Responding to efforts to link CIIS with the Auroville community in India, Project India was an experimental application of the SI approach at the community level. This project took place in November and December of 1995. Under the leadership of Charlie Joiner and Susan Cannon, it worked with the international village at Auroville, India. Participants were also joined by nonstudents, including the president and the director of Latin American affairs of World SHARE, who wanted more experience with the process and more broadly based information about community development and self-help projects throughout the world.

An international community devoted to manifesting the sociospiritual vision of Sri Aurobindo, Auroville is an attempt to both transcend and honor the diversity found among humans and their communities. The intent of this synergy project was to see if SI could help the 1,100 people of Auroville find ways to more fully embody the community's framework of values and commitments in terms of the immense cultural diversity of its residents and relations with the traditional Tamil villagers that surround them.

The group of nine from CIIS met with a like-sized group from Auroville and organized into subteams around the themes of bioregion, economic structure, and community organization. These subteams spent 2.5 weeks clarifying the perspectives of all participants on these issues. A synergy day was designed to involve not only the Auroville synergy team but also major leaders within the community. Authentic dialogue emerged between the CIIS participants and the Aurovillians as they addressed their differing frameworks of assumptions and the issues surrounding how to synergize these frameworks to develop new strategies for community development.

An article in their community newspaper read, "Many of the Aurovillians who attended the afternoon session felt it represented something of a watershed: certain issues were being discussed openly for the first time in Auroville."

The first application of SI in a formal manner in the United States occurred in the winter and spring of 1996. Over the previous 15 months,

serious racial tension had emerged in a cohort of doctoral students at CIIS that included 6 Blacks and 14 Whites. A project was initiated to address the issues of racism and intercultural differences as an integral part of their academic training (see Chapter 11).

As an instructor, Yongming established a diverse design-and-delivery team that actively collaborated during the whole process. Because of limitations of time and participant availability (the students met monthly for 3 days at a time), the SI process had to be highly structured to allow all to participate with the whole experience. Once the group had started the process, however, some felt that the experience was too rich to rush and decided to expand it from a 3-month to a 6-month project.

Dividing into a White team of 14 (including a female member of the faculty) and a Black team of 6, the students used the SI process to explore their racial consciousnesses within their own groups. Then, they used it for an intergroup exploration of the phenomenon of racism. Some of the experiences were intense, and the group in general dived deeply into these issues. The project produced significant, long-lasting effects on the group itself, as demonstrated in the full group's demonstration of learning for advancements to candidacy.

A second U.S. application took place with a small Japanese company in San Francisco in July and August of 1996. The purpose of this project was to improve teamwork, communication, and leadership. Yongming had been called to help the company at a time of crisis. Two symptoms stood out: the financial difficulties experienced by the company and the inability of managers and employees to work with each other to accomplish their tasks.

Yongming and six CIIS students worked for 4 weeks with the owner and his major team, interviewing employees, observing work practices, and engaging in synergy processes. By self-report, the owner was profoundly affected by the experience and has significantly changed his style of management. The inquiry team from the organization evolved a different work spirit, and a new, more nourishing culture developed for the organization as a whole.

Since then, there have been creative applications of SI in corporations and nonprofit settings. SI has been tailored to be delivered in various workshop formats and used as a strategy for coaching and consulting. Regular classes and public workshops in SI are now being offered on a year-round basis, and two organizations—the Global Synergy Network (nonprofit) and the Global Synergy Netlink (for profit)—have been established to promote this synergy work.

A number of former and present participants have begun to actively use SI in their research and publication efforts. These include Masaji Takano, whose dissertation research examines the effectiveness of SI, and Carole

Barlas, whose presentation describing the first application of SI in the United States at the U.S. Educational Research Conference in May 1997 received an award for the best presentation in the Human Justice domain.

Conclusion

Although we are inspired by its potential and timely development, we believe that our SI work is at best rudimentary at this point. This book only benchmarks our current reflections and learnings. For example, the writing of this book has helped us clarify a significant number of issues in ways we had not previously been able to articulate. This implies that there are opportunities for other theorists, methodologists, and practitioners to make contributions to the development of SI. It is in this spirit of sharing and inviting the participation of others that we present this book to you.

PART I

The Synergic Inquiry Methodology and Its Theoretical Foundation

This part of the book is devoted to introducing the synergic inquiry (SI) methodology and explicating its framework and theoretical foundations. It offers a presentation of the SI methodology, and it discusses SI in the context of major research paradigms and other prevalent methodologies. The purpose here is to provide readers with enough information about SI for it to be discussed knowledgeably by theorists and researchers and used by practitioners who are exploring the methodologies available to them, as well as to give fuller information to others who might use SI. The content of each chapter is briefly described in the following paragraph.

In Chapter 2, "Overview of Synergic Inquiry," the basic premises on which SI is based are described, and an overview of the methodology itself with a case illustration is presented. Chapter 3, "The Synergic Universe," discusses the theoretical foundations on which SI was developed. It presents our argument for a significant pattern we identified—the synergy principle—through various sources of cultural wisdoms, social sciences, and natural sciences. Chapter 4 places the methodology in the context of other research paradigms and major methodologies of change; the chapter provides a wider context from which readers can develop an understanding of the uniqueness of SI in its context of research and change methodologies.

The order in which the chapters appear is that which makes sense to us as authors, but it is not the only order in which this book can be read or used. We endeavored to keep each chapter sufficiently coherent and discrete so that they could be read in the order preferred by each reader.

Readers who are interested in only a taste of SI may prefer to read only Chapter 2, "Overview of Synergic Inquiry." This chapter is consolidated to provide an overview of SI with a specific case illustration. Those who are interested in understanding SI with an eye on SI methodology and practices may profit more by reading Chapter 2 and then immediately moving to the case studies presented in Part II. Those who are more interested in examining the theoretical core of SI in relation to its methodological processes may prefer to read Chapters 3 and 4 before a description of the method itself.